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When the English Reformation began, it brought about not only religious changes, but also changes in social practices. With these changes, the virgin—a figure long associated with spiritual purity and lauded by the Catholic Church—was dislocated from her previous prominence in English society. Despite her displacement, the virgin continued to appear frequently in later sixteenth and early seventeenth-century literature. This dissertation considers how early modern English writers constructed virginity in a post-Reformation culture and posits that the tensions between the figure of the virgin and her lack of a cultural niche created a space for writers to examine, formulate, and redefine her.

Defensive virginity, a concept based on a phrase coined by Luce Irigaray, is used in this study as a lens for examining differing literary reconfigurations of virginity in early modern English texts from a variety of genres. Irigaray's term has not to date been utilized as a frame for analyzing texts, but this investigation shows that defensive virginity appears within early modern literature as a possible venue of female agency, for defensive virginity is an action that inscribes agency on the part of the female character who is depicted as defending her virginity. The chapters in this work are divided into case studies that show the varied representations of defensive virginity over a course of time as a way of demonstrating the prevalence of defensive virginity in the period.

DEFENSIVE VIRGINITY FROM SPENSER TO MILTON

by

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To my family:

Your support and patience made completion of this project possible.

In memory of my father, a man who never stopped learning.

APPROVAL PAGE

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INTRODUCTION

With Catholicism's decline in early modern England, the image of the virgin also fell out of favor. By 1590, the first publication date of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, it had been over half a century since Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England, disbanded the convents and monasteries, and initiated the Protestant Reformation. Because virginity lacked the religious and cultural importance it once enjoyed before Henry VIII's break with Rome, one might presume virginity would not be represented with frequency in early modern literature. However, my study shows the figure of the virgin is astonishingly prevalent in later sixteenth and early seventeenth-century English literature. Her prevalence is due to the displacement of virginity, and the virgin figure, in favor of marriage within a newly reformed society which once praised virginity as an ideal spiritual state. Although there was not a culturally defined space for perpetual virginity to exist, some women, like Queen Elizabeth, wanted to remain virgins.¹ Writers of the period, I argue, used tensions between the figure of the virgin and her lack of a cultural niche to probe, formulate, and reframe her in imaginative ways, some of which are positively coded, in a fundamentally Protestant society.

¹ Although the dissolution of the convents removed the most acceptable alternative to marriage for women, some women still wanted to pursue a life of celibacy. Amy Froide discusses the legal and historical positions of single woman in the period in her book titled *Never Married*. Froide's study demonstrates that there were singlewomen in early modern England and by the second half of the seventeenth-century, the number of never married singlewomen was actually on the rise. See Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 164.

In pre-Reformation England, the Catholic Church lauded virginity as the highest state of being for women in the Middle Ages and provided young maidens the opportunity to remain virgins, a position of power, by taking the veil, establishing a privileged role for the virgin within Christianity.² The presence of a cultural space for the virgin in medieval society is evident in the literature of the period, from Chaucer and Gower's more secular stories about virgins to the religious confessions of female mystics like Julian of Norwich;³ the pervasiveness of the virgin figure in these texts is well documented.⁴ But changing tides in religious philosophy brought about by the Reformation resulted in significant alterations in the practice of life-long virginity; with the dissolution of the convents and monasteries, virgins found themselves physically, religiously, and socially displaced.

² Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 64.

³ For example, the story of Virginia is found in multiple sources. In Chaucer's version of the story, Virginius has a daughter named Virginia. A local judge falls for Virginia; under false pretenses her father is summoned to court and told he must relinquish his daughter to the court. Virginius, unable to see his daughter's virginity taken from her in such a manner, kills Virginia to save her virtue. Although there are minor variances of the tale, the plot is essentially the same across several variants. The first appearance of the story is in Livy's (Titus Livius) text titled *The History of Rome*. The story reappears in *The Romance of the Rose*, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and perhaps most famously in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as the "Physician's Tale." Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Physician's Tale," in *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 172-175.

⁴ Major studies on Medieval virginity include: Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih, eds. *Medieval Virginites* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Teresa P. Reed, *Shadows of Mary: Reading the Virgin Mary in Medieval Texts*, *Religion & Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003); Julie Bond Hassel, *Choosing not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2001); Constant J. Mews, ed., *Listen Daughter: the Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, eds., *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing virginity and testing chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000); Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, eds., *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1999).

Adding to the deracination of the virgin was the reformed church's move away from the medieval idealized hierarchy of female worth—maiden, widow, and spouse—to a privileging of marriage over virginity. The hierarchy of female worth from the Middle Ages was exchanged for a trajectory in which all women should progress from maiden to wife. This new social standard relegated virginity to a temporary state along the trajectory; “marriage and conjugal affection became increasingly idealized and encouraged, while the sustained life of celibacy was devalued and dismissed as sinful popery.”⁵ Virginity was important in that it was a profitable and valued female asset, but its value was predicated on the knowledge that marriage and motherhood were the ultimate goals for all women.

In early modern England the virgin's function in society differed from what it once had been, and she “was less likely to be seen as a hieratic symbol of spiritual rewards, becoming instead an instrument for the transference and securing of social and political legacies.”⁶ The sacredness associated with medieval virginity was replaced by worldly concerns about virginal bodies, such as marriage and future heirs, rather than spiritual ones. Because economic, social, political, and, in some cases, dynastic worth was tied to the premise of virginity as a temporary state for young ladies on their path to marriage, women who prolonged or refused marriage entirely by remaining virgins presented a unique challenge to a culture in which perpetual virginity had no place.

Additionally, early modern society's view that life-long virginity should be avoided

⁵ John Rogers, “The Enclosure of Virginity: The Poetics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Revolution,” in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 223.

⁶ Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, “Introduction: The Epistemology of Virginity” in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kelly and Leslie, 17.

contrasted sharply with the fact that a virgin queen sat on the English throne. The tension created by this paradox—the presence of virgins in a culture where there was no designated place for them—produced a discourse about virginity and its effects, not only within early modern social, political, economic, and legal venues, but also in the literature of the period, as writers explored and envisioned the ways in which virginity might fit, or not fit, into a newly reformed society. This phenomenon has not hitherto been fully examined in the critical discourse of early modern literary studies.

There have been many studies on medieval virginity,⁷ several studies that focus on Queen Elizabeth I as the virgin queen, and numerous essays that explore virginity in the early modern period.⁸ However, although virginity is a common theme in the literature of the period, only a handful of books are currently devoted solely to the study of virginity in early modern English literature. The first of these texts is Marie H. Loughlin's 1997 study titled *Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage*.⁹ Loughlin's New Historicist study examines virginity in terms of political, monarchical, and social power structures. Her work limits its scope to five plays by

⁷ See footnote 3 for a listing of studies on medieval virginity in literary texts.

⁸ All the studies on Elizabeth are too numerous to recount here, but major studies on Elizabeth I and virginity include: Phillipa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1990): 30-74; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (England: Thames and Hudson, 1977); Frances Yates, *Astrea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985); Julia M. Walker, ed., *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958); Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Louis Adrian Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁹ Marie H. Loughlin, *Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997).

Fletcher and Beaumont, with an occasional nod to Shakespeare, making the study more about Fletcher and Beaumont and less about the social issues surrounding virginity in the plays. Kathleen C. Kelly and Marina Leslie's *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1999) is an essay collection so wide-ranging in its historical scope and varying in its critical and theoretical approaches that the book is left with no clear and overarching theme beyond the broad topic of virginity.¹⁰ Moreover, their book examines Western literature as a whole, rather than focusing on English literature. Conversely, Mary Bly's *Queen Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (2000) has a decisively narrow focus, as she only looks at homoerotic puns in the Kings Revel's plays from 1607-1608 through the lens of queer theory.¹¹ Theodora Jankowski's book of the same year, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, also examines virginity using queer theory, but her study (though it is broader than Bly or Loughlin's work) is confined to early modern drama, with one exception—a short “Coda” at the conclusion of her book dedicated to Elizabeth I.¹²

My study differs from previous work on virginity in many ways. Unlike Kelly and Leslie's book, my work uses the concept of defensive virginity as a lens for examining different aspects of virginity in early modern English literature, giving my study a more definitive focus and aim. Additionally, the range of texts included in this examination spans up to the mid-seventeenth century and moves beyond early modern

¹⁰ Kelly, Kathleen Coyne and Marina Leslie, eds., *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999).

¹¹ Mary Bly, *Queen Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹² Theodora A. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

public drama to include poetry and a masque, making this study focused, yet more encompassing than the limited studies of Loughlin, Bly, and Jankowski.¹³ My investigation uses and analyzes a variety of literary genres that span almost half a century to demonstrate the strong presence of the virgin in early modern English literature and examines how writers of the period explored and reconfigured virginity in a way that I have termed “defensive virginity.”

The phrase “defensive virginity” is not mine to claim. Luce Irigaray introduced it in her 1977 book titled *This Sex Which is not One*. Irigaray asks, “Will woman not be left with the impossible alternative between a defensive virginity, fiercely turned in upon itself, and a body open to penetration.”¹⁴ The phrase “defensive virginity” highlights the inherent problem women face and have faced since virginity lost its medieval position of power: a choice between two binary existences, both of which use sexual statuses to define them. Despite the deeply connotative nature of the phrase “defensive virginity,” Irigaray does not develop upon the idea of defensive virginity in *This Sex Which is Not One* because it is not the focus of her book.¹⁵ Irigaray never returns to the phrase in *This Sex Which is Not One* either; the term is not used in any of her other works, and to date no one has reclaimed it. The phrase remains much like the virgin—full of untapped potential.

¹³ All three of these studies only address drama. Of the three, Jankowski is the only writer to move into the mid seventeenth-century.

¹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 24.

¹⁵ Irigaray’s book investigates Western constructs of femininity through a multitude of angles. Irigaray examines female sexuality and interrogates what she terms “phallogocentric” psychoanalytic theories. She addresses Lacan directly and posits that women’s identities revolve around a patriarchal language in which women have no place; additionally, Irigaray devotes a significant portion of the book to connections between the female body and economics.

I reclaim and expound upon Irigaray's phrase "defensive virginity" in this study because some early modern writers construct and explore specific situations in which virginity is presented as a possible venue of female agency.¹⁶ In these subtle moments of female agency within the texts, defensive virginity emerges. Virginity, in this work, is a biologic state, an adjective used to describe someone who has not engaged in sex. Defensive virginity, on the other hand, is action, a verb phrase that inscribes agency on the part of the female character who is depicted as *defending* her most treasured asset—her virginity. In each instance where defensive virginity appears in these texts, there is a clearly established relationship between the worth of virginity and the virgin who defends her virginity, with variable success. The characters within these works demonstrate that the virgin's body still has worth, even in a post-Reformation culture, a value worth defending. Furthermore, the authors included in this study investigate ways in which the value of virginity and the virgin figure can be retooled for burgeoning social structures of the period to retain some form of female agency; part of that retooling includes defensive virginity.

Virginity is the one unique and valuable thing that all women of the early modern period possessed, at one point in their lives. I use the term "unique" because for men virginity was not a commodity at all. Only women had the potential to get pregnant and bear illegitimate children, which were a threat to the male-dominated economic system. The term "valuable" is also important since a virgin's body held a certain capital, both

¹⁶ Although I use the term "defensive virginity," and Irigaray coined the phrase, this study does not utilize French feminism as theoretical lens. The only thing I directly appropriate from Irigaray's work is the term "defensive virginity."

sexual and economic, in its untapped potential. As Margaret W. Ferguson points out, the virgin's "cultural value lies partly in the fact that it has *not yet* been used: the specter of an imminent or eventual use, consumption, or violation is indeed central to many cultural conceptions of virginity."¹⁷ Early modern England is one of those cultures. The emphasis in the period is on the potentiality of use inherently woven into the concept of virginity; that potential determines value.

In this work I focus on virginity rather than chastity not only because chastity is a more fluid term than "virgin" or "virginity," but also because of the value attributed to the virgin through her potentiality. One can be a chaste virgin, chaste wife, or chaste widow, and even if there is a lapse in chastity, it can be regained. The value of chastity is found not only in the potential of use (chaste virginity), but also in bodies that have already been used (chaste wives and chaste widows). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines chastity as "purity from unlawful intercourse," meaning one who refrains from engaging in sexual relations with someone other than her husband.¹⁸ This definition is contingent not on potential, but on use.

Since the term "chaste" can describe bodies that hold potential as well as those that have realized their potential through sexual encounters, I have chosen to focus on the more specific term "virginity." A virgin, in the *OED* definition, is someone who "is, or

¹⁷ Margaret W. Ferguson, "Forward," in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., "Chastity," <http://oed.com> (accessed February 10, 2010). Susan Frye also uses the OED definition of chastity in a recent essay, in which she gives thorough discussion of the nuances of the word "chastity." See Susan Frye, "Of Chastity and Rape: Edmund Spenser Confronts Elizabeth I in *The Faerie Queene*," in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), esp. pages 353-355.

remains, in a state of inviolate chastity.”¹⁹ The key word in differentiating a chaste female from a virgin is “inviolate,” which of course indicates that the woman has not engaged in sex. The state of virginity, which the *OED* defines as “abstinence from or avoidance of all sexual relations,” further reinforces the notion that virgins maintain a pure bodily state.²⁰ Additionally, virginity, unlike chastity, can never be recovered once it is lost.²¹ Virginity is a case of “a biological model being used to serve distinct social purposes.”²² The value and worth of the virginal body depends upon its inviolate state, which in turn signifies a wealth of untapped potential, a potential based on social purposes of sexualization and/or marriage.

Ultimately, the value of the female body and the social purposes related to it result in exchanges of women by men.²³ In this system of exchanges, men evaluate and trade women like currency. The most valuable cultural currency in early modern England was virginity. Kathryn Schwarz describes the social impacts of the exchange system on the physical body of the early modern female virgin:

¹⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n. and a., “virgin,” <http://oed.com> (accessed February 10, 2010).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, “virginity” (accessed February 10, 2010).

²¹ Virginity, in my work, describes a woman who has never engaged in a sexual activity, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual in nature and is based on authorial characterizations of the maidens within the texts I examine. For additional information about Medieval tests for virginity and chastity see Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000). For a more general discussion of biologic virginity, see Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, especially pages 4-6 and Kirsten Hastrup, “The Semantics of Biology: Virginity,” in *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, ed. Shirley Ardner (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), 49-65. Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge, 1966), particularly Chapter 9, addresses an anthropological view of virginity in cultures. For applications of biological virginity in early modern drama, see Marjorie Garber’s essay on *The Changeling* titled “The Insincerity of Women” in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 349-368 and William C. Carroll’s “The Virgin Not: Language and Sexuality in Shakespeare,” in *Shakespeare Survey Volume 46: Shakespeare and Sexuality*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 107-119.

²² Kirsten Hastrup, “The Semantics of Biology: Virginity,” 56.

²³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 152.

Early modern virginity materializes social imperatives; both its presence and its lack are understood as imprinted on the body, and that understanding enables evaluation and disposition by men. As a socially arrogated quality, virginity almost by definition locates agency elsewhere than in the subject it describes.²⁴

The key word in Schwarz's text is "almost." Oftentimes agency²⁵ is located beyond the grasp of the maiden to whom the descriptor "virgin" is attached, placed in the hands of a male family member or guardian and *almost* removing all agency from the subject. Yet the power of virginity, the cultural value of the potential stored within a female body, provides an opportunity for agency on the part of the subject, if and when she rejects male evaluation and disposition in favor of retaining control over her own body. The rejection of male appraisal and commodification is a type of agency and defensive act—an act of defensive virginity.

My investigation is literary in focus, but utilizes history as a foundation for contextualizing the religious, economic, and legal position of the virgin in early modern culture and literature. The characters in the texts I discuss are clearly not real women, but their plights do reflect societal concerns stemming from the displacement of the virgin in the period; this displacement, I argue, is the genesis of defensive virginity. All the literary virgins included in this analysis practice defensive virginity, but no two presentations of defensive virginity are exactly the same, nor are they always successful. This is reflective of the ways in which writers reformulated and conceptualized virginity to examine the multi-faceted nature of the relationships between the female body,

²⁴ Kathryn Schwarz, "The Wrong Question: Thinking Through Virginity," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 7.

²⁵ Agency, as I use it, refers to a woman's ability to control and/or to take an active role in a particular situation or endeavor.

virginity, early modern society, law, and economics. In order to showcase specific ways each text approaches defensive virginity, each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of defensive virginity. Chapter one examines the earliest text in the study and provides a general example of the complexities regarding conceptions of virginity in the period. The following chapters look at specific situations in which defensive virginity might be enacted. Chapter two examines how convents reappear on the early modern stage in Protestant England as a possible site of resistance for virgins. The third chapter discusses the ways financial independence can provide a platform conducive to defensive virginity. Finally, the fourth chapter moves well into the seventeenth century and examines how defensive virginity (and its potential violation) can be deployed in literature as a form of political critique. These case studies provide a look at the varying facets of defensive virginity in early modern literature over a course of time in order to demonstrate the prevalence of defensive virginity in the period as an avenue for exploring if there might still be a social place for newly displaced virgins and female agency in a post-Reformation culture.

Chapter one, “Questing for a New Space: Displaced Virgins in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” investigates changing attitudes in early modern culture via a comparative study of two characters from *The Faerie Queene*. Since Spenser proclaimed his epic poem as instructive, my reading of *The Faerie Queene* incorporates the use of Juan Louis Vives’s popular conduct book, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, as a non-fiction reference for defining proper female behavior within the period. Vives was Catholic, and his book was published in 1524, yet these factors did not diminish the text’s popularity, even in a

reformed England. Amazingly, Spenser does apply many of the lessons articulated by Vives into *The Faerie Queene*, though Una in Book I looks very different from Britomart in Book III. Una personifies a cultural ideal that emphasizes virginity, while Britomart's character represents chastity. The difference in the two characters relates to Elizabethan culture's further movement from its Catholic heritage and ideas about virginity by the later 1590s (the last three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1596).

Spenser's fusion of medieval and Renaissance culture allows for an examination of the changes in late medieval and early modern English societal perceptions about virginity. Una, who appears in Book I, represents the type of celibate yet feminine virgin of the later medieval period. Una's beauty, kindness, and passive nature make her presentation similar to that of a saint. However, by Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, the picture of virginity as it is depicted by Britomart is very different. Britomart is a warrior who dresses in armor and fights along side other knights. Britomart's fierce virginity differs from Una's quiet, contemplative virginity, but both women practice defensive virginity in varying ways. Una's defensive virginity is passive, while Britomart's is active. Nevertheless, defensive virginity in *The Faerie Queene* only works to protect virgins until they are married. Juxtaposing these characters together, while noting the appearance of Vives's lessons in the text, demonstrates the complexity associated with representations of virginity and highlights the emergence of the developing concept of defensive virginity as a way of discussing the virgin figure in a culture where her place was in flux.

Chapter two, “Staging the Convent as Refuge in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure*” is a detailed study of two virgins who confine themselves to nunneries—*Measure for Measure*’s Isabella and *The Jew of Malta*’s Abigail. This chapter gives a brief history of convents in England before moving to a textual analysis of the plays. The presence of convents within these plays provide another alternative for maidens aside from marriage, the veil. Compared to the corruption of the city beyond the walls of the nunnery, the cloister presents itself as a possible method of escape. This is problematic because there were no active convents in early modern England; therefore, the convent emerges as a space of resistance within *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure*, for it is presented as the only place in a post-Reformation culture where defensive virginity has a possibility of success.

The opportunity the convent provides is further complicated because the plays are not focused on the maiden’s destiny of marriage, but on the potentiality located within the virginal body, the potential of use. Since perpetual virginity is an option for Abigail and Isabella through the confines of the cloister, their use potential is foregrounded, as a father and brother attempt to control the potential within their bodies. Due to these conditions, life outside the convent is depicted as much more dangerous than life inside the convent, and both women come to identify the nunnery as place of protection as well as a place where they can successfully enact defensive virginity. Although *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* use convents to investigate the complicated issues surrounding virginity and female resistance in the period, the plays eventually conclude

that when the power of defensive virginity is based in religion alone, it is not enough to allow a women to remain life-long virgins in early modern England.

Chapter Three is titled “Fiscally Solvent Virgins in *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl*.” This chapter focuses on the financially solvent early modern virgin. I use historical and legal studies about the social and financial conditions of singlewomen and never-married women in early modern England as a basis for analyzing the way playwrights of the period explore defensive virginity that is empowered by finances. *Twelfth Night*’s Olivia and *The Roaring Girl*’s Moll Cutpurse demonstrate that marriage poses a high risk to virgins who are financially independent, making their virginity defensive in nature, as the maidens try to evade men who try to violate their virginity and take their money. For Olivia and Moll, their finances are just as important as the virginity they guard, for it is their financial solvency the helps them enact defensive virginity.

Interestingly, in addition to their fiscal solvency, Olivia and Moll are portrayed as independent householders in the texts. Olivia keeps control over her life and wealth by maintaining her household, protecting her inheritance from the threat her uncle presents to her estate, and seeking out a spouse who is inferior to her in wealth, class, and age. Moll’s situation is a bit different, but she also controls her household and finances. As a lower class, yet fiscally solvent woman, Moll engages in business transactions, makes money, employs and pays men to work for her, and spends the money she earns as she wishes. In the end, *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl* both depict marriage as part of their happy endings: Olivia marries the man of her choice, and Moll facilitates the

marriage of her friends, Mary and Sebastian. These texts explore, with very different outcomes, the issues concerning fiscally solvent never-married singlewomen in Renaissance England. Olivia and Moll both use money to maintain their virginity and households, but Olivia only practices virginity long enough to secure a marriage she feels will be financially advantageous, while Moll insists she will never marry.

The final chapter in this study is “Milton’s *Ludlow Maske*: Where Defensive Virginity, the Political, and the Philosophic Meet.” In this chapter I examine the intriguing political and historical contexts surrounding the commission of Milton’s *Ludlow Maske*. The occasion of the masque was a political and historical event centered on the installation of Lord Bridgewater to his new post as Lord President of Wales. The Bridgewater family had connections to two historic legal events contemporary to Lord Bridgewater’s installation—the Castlehaven scandal and the Margery Evans rape case. The *Ludlow Maske* also engages with politics surrounding the Caroline court, of which Bridgewater was part via his post, by pointing out the problematic nature of the depraved version of Platonic philosophy Caroline court masques used as their theme. Milton’s masque incorporates historical events and the political climate connected with the Bridgewater family into its storyline and in order to critique the Caroline court’s misuse of Platonic philosophy and highlight the repercussions of inept male guardianship.

The *Ludlow Maske* examines two philosophies regarding sexuality. One is based on the Caroline court’s Platonic cult, which emphasizes the naturalness of sex and associates sexuality with fertility and reproduction. Milton presents this type of sexuality as lustful and bestial. The other philosophy is spiritually based Neo-Platonism, which

emphasizes locating the divine within the self, a process can only occur when the seeker is pure in body and spirit. The Lady in the masque practices Neo-Platonism and enacts a powerful form of defensive virginity by accessing the divine within her to fend off the aggressive seduction she is exposed to at the hands of Comus. Of these two schools of philosophy, Milton endorses that latter and criticizes the former, a direct critique of the Caroline court's Platonism. Milton also suggests that inept male guardianship, which is what places the Lady's virginity in such grave danger, has the potential for dangerous repercussions, a loose allusion to legal issues close to the Bridgewater family. In the end, the defensive virginity practiced by the Lady, because of its relationship with the divine and since the power is wholly inscribed within the individual, represents the most successful form of defensive virginity in this study.

CHAPTER I
QUESTING FOR A NEW SPACE: DISPLACED VIRGINS IN SPENSER'S
FAERIE QUEENE

SIR knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit, I haue thought good aswell for auoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by you commanded,) to discouer vnto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I haue fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by-accidents therein occasioned.¹

By Edmund Spenser's own admission, *The Faerie Queene* is not simply a literary work. Rather, Spenser's introductory letter to *The Faerie Queene*, which was appended only to the 1590 edition, sets forth his authorial objective "to fashion a gentleman or noble person virtuous and gentle" through his writing.² But this fashioning, Spenser states, is not done through direct lessons; instead, the reader should be able to "discouer...the general intention and meaning" through the action of the story and the values characters embody within the text.³ One of those values is virginity. Virginity is also discussed as an essential component of proper female behavior in a popular conduct book of the period, Juan Luis Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*. Even though Vives's book was published in 1524, prior to the Reformation, there are several

¹ Edmund Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors expounding his *whole intention in the course of this worke: which* for that it giuith great light to the Reader, for the better vnderstanding is hereunto annexed" in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 714. All references from *The Faerie Queene* are from Hamilton's 2001 edition unless otherwise noted.

² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 716.

³ *Ibid.*, 716.

similarities between Vives's guidelines for virgins and behaviors exhibited by virgins in *The Faerie Queene*. This chapter focuses on two virgins from *The Faerie Queene*—Una and Britomart—in order to highlight Spenser's exploration and reimagination of the culturally disenfranchised virgin figure, a reimagination that includes the earliest depiction of defensive virginity in early modern English literature.

In *The Faerie Queene* there is a struggle between displaced perpetual virginity and its replacement, chastity. This conflict is drawn to the forefront of the poem's plot and plays an important role in determining the fate of the characters. The audience is exposed to a variety of virgins in the text, but as the story progresses, the treatment of virgins alters. The 1596 publication of *The Faerie Queene* differs from the 1592 version in that it includes a revised Book III and adds Books IV through VI (Books IV, V and VI were not present in the 1592 version of the epic). But the additional content did not just increase the length of the poem; instead, the later additions clearly demonstrate that although women might defend their virginity for a time (defensive virginity), chastity is the victor over virginity, a temporal state available as a lifestyle only to royalty or faeries.

In Book I of *The Faerie Queene* Una is the model of proper female behavior. She is submissive, loyal, and non-violent. Her version of defensive virginity is passive in nature; often she relies on assistance from others to protect her from threats to her virginity. But the vision of femininity and defensive virginity in *The Faerie Queene* alters drastically as Spenser's poem progresses. Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, takes over as the dominant example of female behavior from Book III forward; she is active, violent, disobedient, and outspoken—far from Una's quiet, submissive countenance.

Britomart's defensive virginity is active; she is a martial maiden who, quite literally, defends her virginity throughout the course of her journey. In Book V, however, Spenser makes a clear statement through his text regarding virginity and chastity, as Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, defeats the Amazonian Queen Radigund in a fight to the death.

In this emblematic scene where chastity definitively triumphs over virginity, Britomart hears that her love is held captive by a queen named Radigund. In Radigund's kingdom of women, men who wander into the boundaries of her domain are punished (by making them act as women) or killed. Britomart rides into Radigund's kingdom to save her love and knight. After a long and intense battle, Britomart wins the bloody fight by violently beheading her opponent. Britomart's slaughter of Radigund symbolizes chastity's defeat of virginity. Her victory is not just a physical triumph in battle, but also a moral and social victory for chastity. After winning Artegall's freedom, Britomart surrenders her power to him, crowning him king of Radigund's subjects, while she rules by his side as an obedient and powerless partner. Britomart's victory and relinquishment of power and autonomy is the summation of the trajectory of women in *The Faerie Queene*, despite their practice of defensive virginity, as chastity rather than virginity comes to be the ideal in a society where life-long virginity has no designated place.

Understanding the impact of virginity's displacement is integral to understanding the context of Spenser's epic poem and my approach to it; therefore, we must first examine the reasons for the virgin's dislocation from her former social position, which stem from England's religious transition from Catholicism to Protestantism. This process was not a quick one, but occurred over a sustained period of time. In the Middle Ages

virginity “was the single most essential prerequisite for a life of Christian perfection,” and the ideal state for women “was that of *integritas*, total virginity.”⁴ Refraining from sex was the only way, according to the Catholic Church, women could remove themselves from their inherent and virtually inexorable sexual appetites. Perpetual virginity was advantageous for women because it allowed them to overcome the physical world, thus bringing them closer to God. Since the female body represented a temptation to men, they benefited from female *integritas* as well, for a woman who took vows of celibacy removed herself from her position as a sexually available woman. Female consecrated virgins were admonished “to negate their visual images so as not to be responsible for seducing ‘innocent’ men, as well as causing the loss of their own chastity.”⁵ Essentially, female virgins were responsible for maintaining their own virginity in addition to fending off any male attacks on it (the men had no responsibility for their actions here), making them solely responsible for their bodies—an early act of defensive virginity.

Catholicism endorsed, encouraged and rewarded *integritas* up to the twelfth century with power and privileges extended to women that were much greater than anything they could achieve outside the church. Because of women’s perceived weakness—a propensity for bodily pleasure—female celibates ascended past the restraints of their bodies and were spiritually (and culturally) aligned with men rather than women. Life-long virgins were viewed as gender-neutral by the medieval church, a

⁴ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, “The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986), 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

view that afforded some of them to take “male” positions within the church. The mechanisms within the church that muted the gender of female monastics were the same mechanisms that “allowed women to found and rule abbeys and monasteries [and] allowed them to retain their manly power.”⁶ Since these females were women only in body, in the eyes of the church, they could hold some power, especially if they were abbesses. Abbesses were in charge of the manors and lands that provided income for the monastery, they supervised nuns and lay workers, and some abbesses “held what amounted to the secular rank of baron and could be summoned to serve on parliaments.”⁷ These were positions that were only made available to them because of their *integritas*.

As early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and prior to England’s mass conversion to Protestantism, undercurrents began to “restrict the power of virgins and turn them into women.”⁸ After all, if female celibates’ power came from their gender-neutral state, turning them into women would thus negate that special category within which initiated women gained autonomy. Seeking to feminize women within the church, church leaders began to utilize the Virgin Mary as a symbol for ideal female piety and behavior. Mary presents a very different set of ideals from many of the earlier female

⁶ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginité in Early Modern Drama* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 72. Jankowski cites actual cases in which women were able to do things that were typically confined to men because of their virginity: Hilda of Whitby, Hildegard of Bingen, and Hrotsvith Gandersheim, 65-66. Hilda of Whitby was a member of the presidency of the Whitby council (65). Hildegard of Bingen wrote books on her visions, medicine and natural science; she also composed songs and preached (66). Hrotsvith Gandersheim wrote verse, history, epics, metrical saints’ legends, and the only European drama written before the mystery plays (66).

⁷ Ibid., 65. All information about the power of abbesses comes from Jankowski, 65.

⁸ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginité in Early Modern Drama*, 72.

virgin martyrs. Most obviously, Mary “is not only Christ’s mother, but also his spouse.”⁹ Additionally, Mary consistently follows the orders given to her by God, making her an obedient model of femininity. Secular women were encouraged to mirror Mary’s behavior “before her marriage and enter into it as acceptingly as Mary did her God-given role, and obey her husband unquestioningly once she was married.”¹⁰ Upon the Virgin Mary’s introduction to popular culture of the period, it became easier for religious leaders to replace female *integritas* with chaste marriage as the model state for women.

Marriage as an ideal state for women became the dominant belief, permeating secular and religious thought alike. In 1523 Juan Luis Vives, a Spanish humanist and friend to Sir Thomas More, wrote a very influential conduct book titled *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (*The Instruction of a Christen Woman*).¹¹ Although Vives was Catholic, his book promotes marriage as an inevitable and ideal state for women.¹² In fact, Vives never mentions any other possible choices for women other than marriage, despite his Catholicism. The text is broken into three separate sections: Book 1 discusses maidenhood and virginity, Book 2 focuses on marriage, and Book 3 addresses life as a widow. Although written in 1523 by a Catholic, Vives’s *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* “was considered the most popular and one of the most influential Tudor

⁹ Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 16. For additional reading on the Cult of the Virgin Mary see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

¹⁰ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern Drama*, 73.

¹¹ All quotes from Vives are taken from Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, ed. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman and Margaret Mikesell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). The association between More and Vives is noted in Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 22-23.

¹² Editors of the translation of Vives used in this chapter argue that the subtext of Vives’s book in some ways endorses female celibacy. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman, and Margaret Mikesell, introduction to *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, by Juan Luis Vives, xlv.

conduct books for women,” regardless of their religion.¹³ The text went through several publications, including two Elizabethan editions published in 1585 by Robert Waldegrave and 1592 by John Danter, respectively, and remained popular throughout the sixteenth century.¹⁴ The popularity of the book in early modern England is interesting in part because Vives uses Mary—a mother, wife, and icon of the Catholic faith—as a model example of femininity and piousness. While the later editions of *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* were altered to some extent to reflect English Protestantism and Puritanism, references to the Virgin Mary as a role model remain in the text.¹⁵ Vives’s text is a prime example of how changes in late medieval and early modern culture altered the feminine ideal from life-long virginity to that of chaste marriage. With this change, women lost the possibility of personal autonomy associated with the gender-neutralizing *integritas* and monastic life.

Most women and their families by the late sixteenth century came to accept their new, more restricted roles as described in Vives’s conduct manual, and marriage became the only socially acceptable trajectory into adulthood for young women. The cultural emphasis on wedded chastity became “a particular strategy for privileging the marital union in a social formation that ha[d] traditionally idealized celibacy and virginity.”¹⁶

¹³ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern Drama*, 83.

¹⁴ Caroline McManus, *Spenser’s Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 254, note 30. McManus’s book discusses the relationship between Spenser, contemporary books on female behavior (including Vives) and Spenser’s female aristocratic readers.

¹⁵ Upon examining the textual variants of both the 1585 and 1592 versions, it appears that English editors only altered references to Mary to mold her more as a model of female behavior rather than a Saint worthy of worship. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman and Margaret Mikesell, introduction to *The Instruction of A Christen Woman* by Juan Luis Vives, xxxvii.

¹⁶ Bruce Thomas Boeher, “‘Carelesse Modestee’: Chastity as Politics in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*,” *English Literary History* 55 (1988): 557.

The life-long virgin was thus displaced, and marriage became the cultural ideal. The societal importance of pre-marital virginity and connubial chastity began to permeate early modern literature, just as it permeated early modern culture, but where was the virgin who wanted to prolong her virginal state or reject marriage altogether? Despite her fall from an idealized place within English culture, she continues to surface in a variety of early modern texts, as writers struggled to figure out if there could be some place for her in a newly reformed society and imagined what that place might look like. *The Faerie Queene* demonstrates the difficulties and challenges of depicting virginity in Protestant England, and from those challenges Spenser presents audiences with not only a multitude of virgins, but also a multitude of representations of those virgins, for no two look the same. This chapter examines how Spenser uses Una and Britomart, two very different representations of virginity, as didactic exempla of female behavior and demonstrates how defensive virginity develops as one way a maiden might prolong her virginity for a short time.

Spenser begins his exemplum with Una, who appears in Book I, and builds to Britomart's unquestionable dethroning of virginity as the ideal state for women. Una represents the type of celibate yet feminine virgin of the later medieval period. Una's beauty, kindness, and charity are the cornerstone of her personality. She is akin to a saint—taming lions and attempting to convert satyrs to Christianity during her travels. Although she demonstrates some of the qualities of her medieval virgin predecessors, she is destined to marry as any good Protestant woman should, though her future role of wife is not emphasized as much as her future role as mother. By Book III of *The Faerie*

Queene, the picture of virginity significantly alters to an emphasis on chastity. Britomart looks less saintly and more Amazonian in nature; instead of a veil, she wears armor. Britomart is a warrior, dressing in men's armor and fighting alongside all the other knights as though she were a man. Britomart's fierce chaste virginity is a distinct departure from Una's quiet, contemplative and submissive virginity. Yet Britomart is unable to remain a life-long virgin; in fact, her entire motivation for taking up arms is to locate and marry her future husband. Her story heavily emphasizes that she will become a wife. This culminates in Britomart's slaying of Radigund, a truly Amazonian woman, in order to free her future husband and restore order to Radigund's kingdom by returning men to ruling positions.

The Faerie Queene re-inscribes, I argue, the early modern cultural homogeny of privileging marriage over life-long virginity, and points out that it is only under the most extreme circumstances—such as Belphoebe's immaculate conception and rearing by the virgin goddess Diana—that life-long virginity is possible; defensive virginity, as Spenser presents it, functions only to delay marriage, but is not enough to allow Una or Britomart to completely escape marriage. Although there are a number of virgin characters in *The Faerie Queene*, all but a handful of them marry or are destined to be married in the future.¹⁷ Female virginity is, in *The Faerie Queene*, a state to be passed through on a virtuous young lady's life journey to marriage. Additionally, unlike the religiously empowered, sexless and gender-neutral *integritas* of the Middle Ages, virgin maidens in

¹⁷ Besides Una and Britomart, other virgins who will not remain so are Luciferia, Gloriana, Alma, Medina, Angela, Canacee, Florimell, Mercilla, Mecilla's ladies in waiting, Diana, Astraea, the three Hours and Truth. Belphoebe, the votaries of Isis and Chrysogenea are the only life-long virgins. Life-long virgins are in the minority by far. David Scott Wilson-Okamura, "Belphoebe and Gloriana," *English Literary Renaissance* 39, no. 1 (2009): 47.

The Faerie Queene reflect their inward purity and beauty through their outward appearance as women. Spenser's focus on the physical appearance of virgins in the text relocates the power of the virgin in *The Faerie Queene* outward, onto the young maiden's body rather than her spiritual purity and moral virtue. Virginal maidens are described in terms of their physical beauty and femininity. The virgin is not gender-neutral at all in this case, but highly feminized and sexualized.

It is precisely the physical attractiveness of Una and Britomart that places their virginity in peril. At every turn, there is a sexual confrontation leading Una and Britomart to defend their virginity, an asset that is priceless and must be protected at all costs. Una defends her virginity by depending on others, while Britomart defends herself (and other women) physically. Spenser's focus on beauty and the threat of sexual violation within the text highlights the vulnerability of virgins who no longer have a safe space in which to live (the cloister). Ultimately, these threats are insurmountable by even the most aggressive acts of defensive virginity as represented by Britomart; the only way to escape them, the poem suggests, is through marriage.

I begin this discussion of *The Faerie Queene* with Una not only because her character appears in the first book of Spenser's epic, but also because of Spenser's construction of Una's character as a religious one. Una's behavior has striking similarities to the behaviors associated with Mary as described in Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*. In earlier Christian philosophy and practice, the Virgin Mary was

equated with celibacy and martyrdom, much like that of the virgin martyrs.¹⁸ However, by the later Middle Ages and into early modern times, representations of her shifted to the domestic sphere in a way that emphasized Mary's maternal role within the household; as a result, "the cult of humility, understood as female submissiveness to the head of the house, set the seal on the Virgin's eclipse as a matriarchal symbol."¹⁹ The widespread change in status for the virgin mother of Christ is reflected in conduct books like Vives's *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*, which was commonly read and lauded as a guide for young female behavior. Conduct books such as Vives's used Mary as a model for female behavior by emphasizing her characteristics that helped construct "an image of an acceptable virgin: one who was humble and obedient to all men and easily controlled by parents, husband, and son."²⁰ In Book I, Una reflects these qualities, which are associated with Mary and stressed in Vives's conduct book.²¹ By depicting Una as embodying these ideal qualities, she thus becomes a model for early modern female behavior as well.²² The character is placed into situations that highlight her beauty, weakness, vulnerability and need for male protection, and she models appropriate

¹⁸ See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 68-78 for a discussion of Mary's relationship to virgin martyrs, esp. 70.

¹⁹ Ibid., 188.

²⁰ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern Drama*, 72.

²¹ Within Spenser's religious allegory in *The Faerie Queene*, Una represents the one true church (Protestantism), while the Red Crosse Knight represents the erring Christian (the English) who must be brought to the true religion and true church.

²² I have chosen to discuss Una's relationship to the Virgin Mary because Mary is important in Vives's text, but also because there is a correlation between Elizabeth I (Una is associated with Elizabeth I too) and Mary. It is well documented that Queen Elizabeth rebuilt to cult of the Virgin into the cult of Elizabeth. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 161-162; Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 26-30; Francis Yates, *Astrea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), 78-79.

responses to each circumstance. In this way, Una demonstrates characteristics that should be found, according to conduct manuals such as Vives's, in good, Christian women.²³ From our initial exposure to Una, Spencer indicates that his vision of ideal feminine behavior is not very different from the conceptions of Vives: Una is constructed as a young woman in need of protection, a woman who is subservient, and a woman who will eventually assume a place of subservience within the household.

The poem opens with the physical and moral fortitude of Una's virginity hanging in the balance. This introduction sets the tone for Spencer's exploration of virginity and female behavior in *The Faerie Queene* because for Spencer, virginity is in peril until marriage and must be defended at all costs. In the initial stanzas of Book I, Una's first appearance places her in a potentially precarious situation. She is riding off on a quest to save her kingdom with the Red Cross Knight. In this case, Una's virginity is in danger because she leaves her home with a man who is neither a part of her family or her husband. This transgression goes against a common early modern belief dating back to Jerome, and perhaps even further, that the world was full of temptation and rife with the possibility of physical violation.

St. Jerome's "Letter to Eustochium" (ca. 340-419) articulates cultural concerns for the safety of young virgins and outlines the hazards that await virgins who dare step beyond the protective enclosure of their domiciles:

Go not out from home...Diana went out and was ravished. I would not have you seek a bridegroom in the highways, I would not have you go about the corners of the city...Your spouse cannot be found in the broad ways. *Narrow and strait is*

²³ Vives, in particular, references Mary as a model of female behavior in his conduct book.

*the was that leadeth to life... You will be wounded, you will be stripped, and you will say, lamenting: "The keepers that go about the city found me, struck me, wounded me; they took away my veil from me."*²⁴

The outside world, with its physical and moral dangers awaits the virgin and is no place, according to Jerome, to find a spouse (he is speaking of Christ as the spouse here). There is nothing good that comes from a maiden's ventures out of doors—she may be raped and/or morally and physically wounded. Jerome's warnings and ideas about virginity reflect western cultural views about women, and like the writings of other patristic scholars, found their way into the monastic literature of the early Middle Ages and lingered, at least in some form, into the early modern period, where they are echoed by authors like Spenser.²⁵

These warnings also found their way into conduct manuals, such as Vives's *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*. Vives devotes a chapter of his book to "Howe the mayde shall behave her selfe forth abrode" (Chapter 12). He speaks of the imminent risks to young virgins if they must leave the home of their parents—a practice he strongly advises against:

Forth she muste nedes go some tymes, but I wolde hit shulde be as selde as may be, for many causes. Principally bycause as ofte as a mayde goth forth amonge people, so often she cometh in judgement and extreme perel of her beautie, honeste, demureness, witte, shamfastnes, and virtue.²⁶

²⁴ Jerome quoted in Jane Tibbitts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation," 32.

²⁵ Jane Tibbitts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation," 37.

²⁶ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 59.

Vives's main concern, like Jerome and Spenser, is for the irreparable damage virgins subject themselves to by coming into contact with the outside world. While Jerome's arguments address both the physical and moral perils of maidens, Vives focuses on the assets of the young virgin, those things that will make her valuable in marriage negotiations—her physical beauty and reputation. Vives goes on to say that virgins should act like Mary: "They say, that the holy virgin our lady was demure and sadde, that if any man caste a wanton eie upon her, that foule heate was all quenched as though a man had caste a fyre brande in to the water."²⁷ Vives urges young women to model Mary's behavior if they must go out, which will, he claims, protect them from male desire. In this case, the word "sadde" retains its more archaic meaning of "steady" or "serious."²⁸ This is evidenced by Vives use of "demure" in the sentence as well, which has a very similar connotation ("sober, grave, serious").²⁹ Essentially, the countenance of the virgin, if she appears demure and serious, is capable of turning off male lust.

Furthermore, maidens should, if at all possible, travel with "some sad woman, that is wydowe, or a wife, or some good mayde of virtuous lyvyng, sobre of speche, and holy shamfastnes."³⁰ Vives uses sad in this sentence differently. In the context of this piece of advice, sad does mean "sorrowful," for the other qualities listed, particularly "sobre speech" (somber meaning "gloomy"), indicate that sorrow is the likely meaning in this context.³¹ Sadness, whether it is "serious" or "sorrowful" in nature, when used by

²⁷ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 59.

²⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., adj., "sad," <http://oed.com> (accessed February 18, 2010).

²⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., adj., "demure," <http://oed.com> (accessed February 18, 2010).

³⁰ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 59.

³¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., adj., "sad," <http://oed.com> (accessed February 18, 2010).

virgins, has the power to deflect male desire, according to Vives. This is because a “serious” or “sorrowful” countenance hampers the sexual potential within the virginal body on the exterior. Rather than appearing open and inviting, a virgin taking Vives’s advice will give off a sense of being closed-off through her serious or sorrowful demeanor, thus negating male desire.

Una’s description combines and reflects the concerns of Jerome and Vives. Her purity is described in terms of the whiteness that surrounds her:

A louely Ladie, rode him faire beside,
Vpon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide
Vnder a vele, that wimpled was full low...³²

Spenser’s language evokes extreme images of virginity in his use of the color white, as Una is not simply white. Her whiteness is whiter than the whiteness of her ass, which is “more white than snow.” Effectively, Una is whiter than white that is whiter than snow. This use of words brings to mind a brilliant white, perhaps the white of illumination, setting the stage for Una’s role in Book I as the “Truth” of Christianity and an exemplar of virtue and purity. Interestingly, Spenser places a veil on Una too. The veil has long associations with nuns and modesty, since the veil covers the beauty of the female face. Recall that Jerome mentions the veil in his letter to Eustochium as a piece of clothing that may be forcibly removed by men in the outside world, signaling that the veil acts as an exterior marker of the virgin’s interior purity. It is an external marker that acts as a double-edged sword—the veil simultaneously acts as a signal of purity, while the

³² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.i.4.1-4.

mystery of what beauty may hide beneath the veil incites lust, ironically, through the unknown.

Una's portrayal also mirrors advice given by Vives regarding the power of sadness as a defense mechanism for young ladies:

And ouer all a blacke stole shee did throw,
As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,
And heauie sate vpon her palfrey slow;
Seemed in heart sone hidden care she had,
And by her in a line a milewhite lambe she lad.³³

Spenser's description of Una's clothing and countenance creates an image of a woman who is sorrowful and unapproachable in appearance. She wears black as if she is in mourning, and her body language expresses that she has some internal burden she bears.

Una's clothing and body language show the Red Cross Knight and readers that she is pure and virtuous. She follows the advice of Jerome by wearing a veil. At the same time, she heeds the advice of Vives by using sadness as a defense mechanism against male lust. Spenser shows readers that when women must go out into the world, they should do so with caution and properly arm themselves to defend their virginity. In Book I, physical appearance—her demeanor, beauty, and use of the veil—is Una's only armor to fend off the multitude of threats to her virginity.

³³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.i.4.5-9.

The use of physical appearance as a form of defensive virginity is passive in nature, and Una is never able to defend her virginity actively in Book I. During her adventure many wild and powerful animals relinquish their natural traits and powers to Una, oftentimes stepping in to defend her virginity. After the Red Cross Knight abandons Una in a jealous response to the false, magic-induced dream depicting Una as a harlot, the Lion becomes her defender.³⁴ The choice of a lion comes, as Irving Ribner notes, from medieval metrical romance.³⁵ Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hamoun, Malory's Percival version and Chrétien's Ywan, Le Chevalier au Lion are all predecessors of Spenser's use of the lion as a motif from the medieval romance tradition. Nonetheless, Spenser's application "in which a lion is represented as the protector of a woman *and* one who represents both religious faith and virginity" (emphasis mine) does not match those of his forerunners.³⁶ Spenser's unique utilization of the lion as a symbol of religion and virginity underscores how these two concepts are tightly interwoven in the early books of *The Faerie Queene*. Life-long virginity, no longer a spiritual or religious choice available to women during the 1590s, emerges as the symbolic Lion in Spenser's text and highlights the tensions that shifting cultural views on virginity placed on early modern English society.

³⁴ The Red Cross Knight has long been recognized as an allegory for St. George. For more on this and the link of Una's lamb to the St. George story see Franklin B. Williams, Jr., "The Iconography of Una's Lamb," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 74 (1980): 301-05, Ivan L. Schulze, "The Maiden and her Lamb, Faerie Queene, Book I," *Modern Language Notes* 46, no. 6 (1931): 379-81, and Edwin Greenlaw, "Una and her Lamb," *Modern Language Notes* 42, no. 8 (1927): 515-16.

³⁵ Irving Ribner, "Una's Lion: a Folklore Analogue," *Notes and Queries* 196 (1951): 114.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

Additionally, the Lion from Book I of *The Faerie Queene* has been thought to represent kingly power, quite possibly Henry VIII.³⁷ He is described in kingly terms: “Lyon Lord,” “princely puissance,” “mightie proud” and more explicitly as a “kingly beast” who is “full of kingly aw.”³⁸ The “language suggests that the lion may be an embodiment of kingly power, more specifically the power of the kings of England, who supported a rampant lion as their emblem” because of its association with strength and courage.³⁹ We are accustomed to such readings because lions have an iconic place in our cultural ethos as representing power—after all, the lion is king of the jungle. The raw power of the lion, along with its natural crown of yellow fur makes it a natural symbol of royalty, and aligns Spenser’s Lion with a king, particularly Henry VIII.⁴⁰ Yet to accept the Lion’s presence in the text as solely an allegorical representation of Henry overlooks the Lion’s main function, and his main function is to protect Una, as she is unable to completely protect herself.

Spenser’s use of the Lion as a protector of his young, virginal heroine in Book I is well documented.⁴¹ Elizabeth Heale, author of *The Faerie Queene: A Reader’s Guide*, explains that the prototype for Una is the biblical woman in the wilderness from

³⁷ Donald Cheney, *Spenser’s Images of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in “The Faerie Queene”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 45.

³⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, l.iii. 7, 8 and 41.

³⁹ Elizabeth Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader’s Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 28.

⁴⁰ Chaney argues the lion represents Henry VIII’s violence which “lacks the guiding intelligence of a statecraft which can consolidate its achievements” See Donald Chaney, *Spenser’s Images of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in “The Faerie Queene,”* 45. John King sees the lion’s run-in with Kirkrapine as a reference to Henry’s dissolution of the monasteries. John King, “Spenser’s Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion of Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 211.

⁴¹ In a recent article about Jacobean marginalia in *The Faerie Queene* Andrew Fleck notes that an early modern reader (Brook Bridges) of Spenser’s epic, like modern commentators, picked up on the connections between Book I and the book of Revelation. Andrew Fleck, “Early Modern Marginalia in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* at the Folger,” *Notes and Queries* 55, no. 2 (2008): 167.

Revelation (12.13-14), and like her biblical counterpart, Una “is under divine protection” of the Lion.⁴² A recent study by Katherine Walls argues that the relationship between Una and the Lion is greater than one of protector and protected. According to Walls, the pair is very different, but they gradually become interchangeable in their emotions.⁴³ While Walls’s assertion that the complicated emotional bond between these two characters and the religious implications of their relationship has undoubted merit, the didactic importance of the link between the Lion and Una’s virginity must also be addressed. The issue of social instruction is not discussed by Walls or the handful of scholars who have examined the Lion’s meaning in Book I, despite Spenser’s assurances that the text is instructive.

Because Spenser touts his text as, among other things, a guide for female behavior, womanly conduct and its results are a significant aspect of any textual analysis of *The Faerie Queene*. Part of Walls’s argument is important as a foundation for my larger discussion about Una and her Lion, so it is worth explaining in detail. Walls suggests, rightly so, that much should be made of the first meeting between Una and the Lion. Una is described in angelic terms just before the Lion enters:

Her angels face
 As the great eye of heauen shyned bright,
 And made a sunshine in the shady place;
 Did neuer mortall eye behold such heauenly grace.⁴⁴

⁴² Elizabeth Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader’s Guide*, 27.

⁴³ Kathryn Walls, “Abessa and the Lion: The Faerie Queene, I.3.1-12,” *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 5 (1985): 17.

⁴⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.4.6-10.

The last line above states that no “*mortall* eye” (emphasis mine) has seen such a heavenly face, yet the Lion does see Una’s face. He sees her when she is unveiled, but his observation of Una occurs “in a secret shadow, farre frome all mens sight.”⁴⁵ As the Lion sees Una’s face, Spenser hints that he may not be mortal at all, and though the divine right theory of kingship boasts royalty as immortal, there are other clues that align this pair to immortals of a less worldly kind. The initial meeting between Una and the Lion parallels the conversation between Mary and God’s angelic ambassador.⁴⁶ Una’s reaction to the beast provides further evidence for his immortality: “The Lyon Lord of euerie beast in field, / Quoth she, his princely puissance doth abate, / And mightie proud to humble weake does yield.”⁴⁷ The change in the beast Una speaks of “stresses the analogous change undergone as a symbol of...God himself, the lion as ‘Lord,’” and it is “worth noting that an association between the lion as Christ and God incarnate is traditional.”⁴⁸ This connection between beast and divinity is further linked back to the mother of Christ via late medieval art images of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁹ The parallels between Christ, God, and the Lion, as well as Mary and Una, firmly correlate Spenser’s pair to Christianity.

But the link between these characters is not only religious; it is also an instructive model for female behavior. Linking Una to Mary and the Lion to God and Christ reflects the ways in which the Virgin Mary’s story was invoked and reconfigured from one that empowered female virginity to an exemplar of female behavior that privileges virginity

⁴⁵ Kathryn Walls, “Abessa and the Lion: *The Faerie Queene*, 1.3 1-12,” 18 and Spenser, I.iv.4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.i.7.1-3.

⁴⁸ Kathryn Walls, “Abessa and the Lion: *The Faerie Queene*, 1.3 1-12,” 19.

⁴⁹ Gertrude Schiller, *Iconology of Christian Art*, vol. I, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CN: New York Geographic Society Ltd., 1971), 23-25. For a full and detailed discussion of the biblical connections found in the scene between the Lion and Abessa, see Walls’s essay in *Spenser Studies*.

only as a means to secure a chaste marriage. Una only unveils herself in the presence of God (as the Lion), and does so out of sight, in a secret place. She is able to talk with God, revealing her past experiences and difficulties. She feels “pure affection” for the Lion, who doubles as God in their encounter. The Lion recognizes Una’s value as a virgin and the threats that come with her pricelessness; therefore, he acts as Una’s defender while the Red Cross Knight abandons her, protecting this young maiden who is wandering, up to this point, alone in the woods. This scene teaches audiences that a maiden’s place is one of subservience and passivity. Because Una is a woman, she is unable to defend her own virginity physically, so the Lion offers her his assistance in protecting her and guarding her virginity.

The Lion’s role as protector is evident in the scene that takes place at the home of Abessa and Corceca (mother and daughter) in Book I, Canto 3. Una learns a powerful lesson at the home of these two women: threats to virginity vary in nature and may come from anywhere, even within the confines of a house, especially if that household is corrupt. Having nowhere else to stay for the night, Abessa and Corceca allow Una and the Lion to sleep in their home. The motivations of Abessa and Corceca are not grounded in Christian charity or hospitality, for the women are corrupt both in their beliefs and relationships with God. Rather, the women allow Una and the Lion to stay at their home out of fear; they are afraid of the Lion. Following the idea that the Lion symbolizes God and Christ, these iniquitous women have more to fear from the Lion than his physical strength. It is commonly acknowledged that both women are representations of negative Catholic stereotypes as their names indicate: “Abessa” is a play on the word

“Abbess,” and as such, she signifies the Catholic abbeys and monasteries, while “Corceca” comes from Latin roots and symbolizes the blind (*caecum*) heart (*cor*) which propagates ignorance.⁵⁰ Abessa is additionally described as the “whore” of Kirkrapine, a man who steals religious articles and lavishes them on his lover.⁵¹ The threats to Una in their home are multiple—the women are corrupt and may damage Una’s reputation, they might corrupt her spiritually with their false religion, but more importantly, Kirkrapine (who might invade the home at any moment) is a potential threat to Una’s virginity.⁵² Since the Lion is Una’s protector, he must prevent any violation of her virginal state, and he recognizes that even though Una has shelter, she is not safe in such an immoral place.

Una’s lack of safety comes as a result of Abessa and Corceca’s corruption, which corrodes not only the soul, but also the sanctity of the home. A home should provide respite and protection for virgins, but the immoral actions of Abessa and Corceca leave their home vulnerable to the possibility of violation and penetration. The Lion, sensing the susceptibility of their home, remains alert while the women sleep, and “at [Una’s] feet the Lyon watch doth keepe.”⁵³ He does not have to wait long before the home is violated and another threat to Una’s virginity presents itself. Kirkrapine enters the house by force, breaking down the front door when the women within the home are in their most vulnerable state—asleep. This intrusion is made possible by the base behavior of Abessa and Corceca; if the women did not associate with a known criminal, their home would not have been susceptible to his attack. It is their moral weakness that allows Kirkrapine

⁵⁰ This information is taken from A.C. Hamilton’s notes to *The Faerie Queene*, page 57, Stanza 18, note 4.

⁵¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.18.5.

⁵² Spenser describes Kirkrapine as a lusty man with no morals. *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.16-19.

⁵³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.15.4.

to breach the threshold of the house. The rupture of the home, a place that should be a safe haven for virgins according to Jerome and Vives, parallels a violation of the virgin and represents the largest threat for virtuous maidens who wander out into the world. The Lion takes no chances with Kirkrapine, for he knows what is at stake; if Una's virginity is taken from her, it can not be regained. She will be forever stained and unfit to marry the Red Cross Knight. The Lion kills Kirkrapine, "[a]nd seizing cruell clawes on trembling brest, / Vnder his Lordly foot him proudly hath suppress."⁵⁴ Ultimately, Abessa's sexual escapades with Kirkrapine negate the sanctity and protection of home, and his threat to Una serves as a symbolic warning to maidens: sexual encounters that are motivated by lust rather than chaste love can ultimately lead to a violation of the one thing maidens hold dear—their virginity. A breach of a maiden, like the breach of a home, is violent and must be prevented. However, Una's passive defensive virginity is unable to prevent the breach; she must rely on the Lion for her protection.

Eventually, Una's trusty and loyal Lion meets his death at the blood-stained hands of Sansloy while once again defending Una's virginity.⁵⁵ With the Lion gone, Una finds herself in grave danger: "Who now is left to keepe the forlornes maid / From raging spoile of lawlesse victors will?"⁵⁶ Spenser teaches his audience that virgins need protection through the Lion and his good works, yet at the same time Spenser aligns Una's temporary state of virginity with Mary and biblical teachings. Like Mary, Una is a virgin, but she will become a wife and mother too. Because Una is trying to reunite with

⁵⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.19.8-9.

⁵⁵ Sansloy attempts to rape Una in Canto vi.

⁵⁶ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.iii.42.1-2.

her future husband (the Red Cross Knight), there is a subtle implication her virginity only needs protection for a short time, until marriage. At that point, Una, as a model for well-behaved ladies, will surrender her virginity and accept her role as a wife, still looking to Mary, albeit the wife and mother roles of Mary, as a guide. The inclusion of the Lion as a symbol of God, Christ and the *transitory* protector of virgins, further aligns Christian Protestant teachings with the notion that virginity is a temporary state that is only in need of defense until marriage.

The connections between Una and the Lion are not only biblical in nature. In Vives, virginity is also allied with wild beasts. He mentions lions specifically:

Virginite was ever an holy thing even amonge theves, breakers of Sayntuary, ungratious lyvers, murderers; and also amonge wylde beastes. Saynt Tecla,⁵⁷ as saynt Ambrose sayth, altered the nature of wylde beastes with the reverence of her virginite. Virginite hath so moche marveyulous honoure in hit, that wylde Lyons regare hit.⁵⁸

Vives indicates that virginity is so holy, even uncivilized men and beasts recognize it and treat virgins with reverence. The lion, an animal often associated with pride and power on one hand and God and Christ on the other, regards virginity and honors it, according to Vives. Spenser echoes this teaching and amplifies it by linking Una and the Lion to Protestantism as outlined earlier. Readers should note the following lesson from Una's encounter with the Lion: virginity is recognized and defended by God and wild beasts.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Una's relationship to Saint Thecla see Caroline McManus, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women*, especially pages 227-229.

⁵⁸ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 31.

Spenser advances his point about the perils of virgins out in the world as well as the effects of virginity on non-humans by placing Una in a situation where wild animals once again come to her rescue and act as her defenders in the absence of her knight. Sansloy takes an unprotected and vulnerable Una by force, following the death of the Lion. It is no coincidence that Spenser makes a point to tell his readers Una's veil is back on once again, as she is no longer in the presence of the Lion/God. Sansloy's heart is incensed by Una's virtue, which is hidden beneath her veil (just as Vives describes in Chapter 12). He burns with sexual desire and lust. The veil in this scene acts as a protective barrier, removing Una's face from public view. Her face, in its feminine beauty, becomes the catalyst for Sansloy's sinful feelings because it is veiled and hidden. He is aroused by the idea of what beauty may lie beneath her wimple.

True to *The Faerie Queene's* role as an instructive text, the use of the veil in Book I matches up quite nicely with Vives's Book I in *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*. Vives explains, in greater detail than Jerome, the rationale for use of a veil on young virgins in the section titled "Of the virtues of a Woman, and examples that she should folowe" (Chapter 11). He advises:

And as the stoicke philosophers reken, that all goodness standeth in wysedome, and all yll in foyle, in so moche that they sayd, only the wyse man to be ryche, fre, a kyng, a cytesyn, fayre, bolde, and blessed: and a fole, poure, a thrall, an outlawe, a stranger, foule, a cowherde, and wretched: lyke wyse it is to be judged of chastitie in women, that she that is chaste is fayre, well favored, ryche, fruitful, noble, and all best thynges that can be named: and contrary, she that is unchaste is a see and treasure of all ylanes: now sheamefastnes and sobrenes be the inseperable companions of chastity, in so moche that she can nat be chaste that is nat ashamed: for that is as a cover and a vaylle of her face. For whan nature had ordeyned, that our faces shulde be open and bare of clothes, she gave it the vaylle of shamefastnes, where with hit shulde be covered, and

that for a great commendation, that who so dyd loke upon hit, shulde understande some great virtue to be [M1r] under that cover: nor no man shulde se hit covered with that vaylle, but he shulde love hit: nor none se hit naked of that, but he shulde hate hit.⁵⁹

Tellingly, Vives discusses chastity rather than virginity in this section, highlighting his assumption that women will marry and live chaste lives rather than remain life-long virgins. Vives steeps his view in historical precedent, as does Spenser, both men carrying forth the concept of the veil as an avatar of virtue, virginity, and chastity. Vives associates outward appearances with inward virtue, just as Spenser does in *The Faerie Queene*. To be pious is to be beautiful, like Una; the outward, according to these men, identifies the inward.⁶⁰ Yet the outward must be hidden from view. A maiden's face should be hidden; if she conceals her face, one can assume what is hidden is virtuous and only those that have love, rather than lust, will understand and love her, even with the veil. If a maiden shows her face, she demonstrates a lack of virtue, and any man who sees her nakedness should hate it.

The veil further ties Una back to Jerome's cautionary words from his letter to Eustochium about the vulnerability of the female virgin in public. It also recalls the parallels between Mary, the bride and mother of Christ, and Una, underscoring Una's direct relation to religious iconology. As a "bride of Christ she need[s] to be carefully guarded so as to remain unwounded' or 'untarnished' for her eternal bridegroom."⁶¹

Unlike the protection of Mary or the virgin St. Eustochium, the protection of Una's

⁵⁹ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 51-52.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that Spenser also points out that only the righteous can discern between real and false beauty/virtue. This is exemplified in the Red Crosse Knight's misidentification of Duessa.

⁶¹ The "she" in this quote contextually refers to any female virgin, not Una specifically. Jane Schulenburg, *The Heroics of Virginity*, 32.

virginity in *The Faerie Queene* safeguards her for a worldly bridegroom. Una will bear children with her husband (not by a virgin birth like Mary), reflecting early modern culture's abandonment of life-long virginity in favor of marriage.

In this instance the veil does not prove powerful enough to fend off Sansloy. His attempted rape of the virgin is mirrored in his forced removal of her veil:

But wordes, and lookes, and sighes she did abhore,
 As rock of Diamond stedfast euermore.
 Yet for to feed his fyrie lustfull eye,
 He snatcht the vele, that hong her face before;
 Than gan her beautie shyne, as brightest skye,
 And burnt his beastly hart t'efforce her chastitye.⁶²

Una tries to keep her beauty hidden under the veil because she is behaving the way a proper young woman should. This covering of her beauty, a distinctly feminine trait, calls to mind the gender-neutrality and sexlessness of a medieval *integritas*. Once Una's feminine beauty is revealed, Sansloy loses control, and since Una is traveling unaccompanied through the woods (a direct violation of Vives' directions regarding female conduct), she is truly in a precarious position in which her virginity is threatened, and she is unable to actively defend her virginity against Sansloy's advances. It should be noted that Sansloy does not try to rape Una with the veil intact. According to Vives, to leave a veil in place is an act of love, but to remove it is an act of hate. Spenser echoes this idea by having Sansloy forcibly remove Una's veil as an act of hatred that functions as a precursor to the attempted rape, another act of hatred. The brilliance of Una's unveiled virtue is such that it radiates to heaven where the "heavenly virgin thus outraged

⁶² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.v.4.4-9.

see.”⁶³ The screams of the virgin resonate throughout the woods, and in what Spenser deems an act of “Eternall prouidence,” a group of fauns and satyrs hear her cries and arrive to investigate.

The band of satyrs does not act on the behalf of Una like the Lion; instead, their appearance is so disturbing that Sansloy gets “...his ready steed, and fast away gan ryde.”⁶⁴ Una stands before the animals unveiled. The satyrs are stunned by her beauty, yet the gravity of her melancholy overtakes them and there is no inclination to lust on their part. Recall that Vives recommends a healthy dose of seriousness and sorrow as a type of protection for virgins who must leave the confines of their homes, which will, according to Vives, negate the hot fires of lust as a defensive tool to protect a young maiden’s virginity. A disheveled, beautiful youth thus fails to become an object of desire, and instead becomes an object of pity. Spenser sets up the scene in such a way that the reader witnesses the changing perceptions of the satyrs as they watch Una:

Such fearfull fitt assaid her trembling hart,
 Ne word to speake, ne ioynt to moue she had:
 The saluage nation feele her secret smart,
 And read her sorrow in her count’nance sad;
 Their frowning forheads with rough hornes yclad,
 And rustic horror all a side doe lay,
 And gently grenning, shew a semblance glad
 To comfort her, and feare to put away...

They in compassion of her tender youth,
 And wonder of her beautie souerayne,
 And wonne with pittie and vnwanted ruth,

⁶³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.vi.5.6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I.vi.8-9.

And all prostrate vpon the lowly playne
Doe kisse her feete, and fawne on her with count'nance fayne.⁶⁵

The satyrs and fauns's reaction to Una has been looked at from several angles. Shelia Cavanagh argues that the satyrs and fauns do not respond to Una in a lustful way due to her parentage.⁶⁶ Caroline McManus asserts that their childlike naïveté prevents the satyrs and fauns from lusting for Una.⁶⁷ Others, such as Richard Douglas Jordan, take a religious approach in their explanations. Jordan claims the satyrs and fauns are not pagans but Jews, while Donald Cheney describes the fauns as harmless in their "tendency to 'worship backwards' in the sense of making Una a pastoral queen rather than an image of divine beauty."⁶⁸ I suggest that the satyrs observe and are sensitive to Una's countenance, the very tactic Vives encourages women to employ as a defensive move when they are out of their homes. The fauns and satyrs's empathy towards Una negates any sexual desires from arising in them. Instead, they feel awe, but in a different way—they wonder at her.

This wonder leads the satyrs to worship Una. She attempts to use their wonder as a tool to help her teach these pagans the gospel as a good Christian woman should. By Canto xxx her veil is back on, and she is hard at work trying to educate her followers about "the truth" and "true sacred lore" of Christianity.⁶⁹ During Una's stay with the fauns and satyrs, she takes on a motherly role in addition to her role as teacher, as

⁶⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.vi.11.1-8 and I.vi.12.5-9.

⁶⁶ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires Female Sexuality in The Faerie Queene* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 107.

⁶⁷ Caroline McManus, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women*, 239.

⁶⁸ Richard Douglas Jordan, "Una among the Satyrs: *The Faerie Queene*, 1.6," *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (1977): 125. Donald Chaney, *Spenser's Images of Nature*, 61-62.

⁶⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.vi.19.6 and I.vi.30.8.

Caroline McManus notes.⁷⁰ Una's dual function as mother and teacher parallels Vives's writing about the power of virgins who emulate the Virgin Mary. Vives points out that like Mary, virgins are mothers, daughters and spouses to God, at least until they take a proper husband. As evidence of the maternal power of virginity, he writes, "among those foule and filthy goddis of the pagans, they saye that Cybele, whome they all called mother, was a virgin."⁷¹ In *The Faerie Queene*, Una takes on a maternal and instructive position with the pagan satyrs and fauns who save her, and they react just as Vives mentions; they see her as a mother, not a lover or object of desire. Una is not successful in teaching the satyrs and fauns due to their "failure to distinguish between image and idea, a breakdown of religion into idolatry."⁷² However, she wins the devotion of Satyrane (a creature who is half satyr, half human). Satyrane's humanity allows him to be receptive to Una's teachings, and Spenser advises that indeed Satyrane has "learned her discipline of faith and verity."⁷³ In following Mary's example as a mother and teacher, Una is successful in teaching Satyrane about Christianity.

Yet the undercurrent which runs beneath Spenser's endorsement of Una's piety through her ability to tame wild beasts is countered by Una's fate of marriage, which is virtually inescapable throughout Book I. There is no doubt that although Una is a virgin, perhaps a virgin of saintly status, her virginity is something that is defended only to preserve her successfully for marriage; life-long virginity, with its power over the king of

⁷⁰ For a thorough discussion on Una and other characters in *The Faerie Queene* as a mother, see McManus, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women*, especially pages 229-248.

⁷¹ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 30-31.

⁷² Donald Chaney, *Spenser's Image of Nature*, 61. Chaney argues that this passage is motivated by Spenser's love of the pastoral. See pages 54-65.

⁷³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.vi.31.9.

the jungle and its ability to charm pagans, is never presented as an option for Una, since she has proven that she is unable to defend her virginity throughout the quest. She must find and live under the guardianship of someone who can protect her. Una's interactions with Satyrane work as a testing site for skills she will use in her ultimate role as wife and mother; it is an examination she passes with flying colors. Her test run at motherhood over, Una must return to the real task at hand—finding her future husband. Satyrane, recognizing Una's "deare heart with anguish [the Red Cross Knight] did torment" assists with her escape from the Satyrs's home in the woods to search for her knight.⁷⁴

Although Una is able to teach Satyrane the secrets of Christianity, she is incapable of teaching her future husband how to extract himself from the clutches of Despair, who cuts short the happy couple's reunion. Despair brings the knight to the brink of suicide, but Una is able to stop him from harming himself. Una's response when she sees the Red Cross Knight trying to kill himself results in an instinctive and isolated moment of authority and direct action:

Out of his hand she snatcht the cursed knife,
And threw it to the ground, enraged rife,
And to him said, Fie fie, faint hearted knight,
What meanest thou by this reproachfull strife?⁷⁵

This is the most decisive action Una takes throughout Book I, yet her agency quickly fades once the crisis has passed. Una returns to her reserved and subservient position, and by the next canto, she is taking the knight to the house of Holiness for the assistance

⁷⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.vi.32.4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I.ix.52.4-7.

she is unable to give him. The House of Holiness is a place where relief is given to “wretched soules, and help [to] the helpless pore.”⁷⁶ The Red Cross Knight is reborn a true Christian within the confines of the House of Holiness, where he learns about Christian values and heals from his moral and physical wounds. In spite of Una’s virtue, or perhaps because of it, she is incapable of healing the Red Cross Knight the way he is healed at the House of Holiness. Early modern codes of conduct dictate that a virtuous woman should not speak in the presence of a man who is not her husband.⁷⁷ Una and the Red Cross Knight ultimately marry, but at this point in the story (Book I, Canto x), they are not betrothed to one another; therefore, Una is unable to be his teacher.⁷⁸ Vives explains that a woman should “...in company [of men] holde her tonge demurely. And let fewe se her, and none at al here her.”⁷⁹ Vives couches his beliefs in the teachings of Paul and Corinthians: “Let your women holde thyr tonges in congregations: not they be nat allowed to speke but to be subjecte as the lawe biddeth.”⁸⁰ As a model for ideal feminine behavior, Una can teach Satyrane because he is not fully human, yet since women should not speak to men, she can not teach the Red Cross Knight, her future husband, what he needs to know. Those teachings must come from someone else, such as the holy women at the House of Holiness.

⁷⁶ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.x.3.7.

⁷⁷ Caroline McManus asserts that Una’s behavior during Red Cross’s encounter with Despair is an act “on the obligation of a Christian helpmate to encourage, even admonish her spouse in godly behavior,” but Una and the Red Cross Knight are not married until the final stanzas of Book VI.

⁷⁸ Una is able to teach Satyrane because he is *not* human. She is able to converse with the Lion since he symbolizes God.

⁷⁹ Juan Louis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

It is through Charissa at the House of Holiness that the Red Cross Knight learns of chaste love, the type of love he should have for Una, for “chaste love is tacitly endorsed in the personification [of] Charissa.”⁸¹ Spenser describes Charissa’s feeling about love:

...*Cupids* wanton snare
As hell she hated, chaste in worke and will;
Her necke and brests were ever open bare,
That ay thereof her babes might sucke their fill.⁸²

Charissa’s presence in the House of Holiness “suggest[s] a complimentary relationship between secular and divine values” where love is endorsed, but only when it is chaste love.⁸³ This relationship again reinscribes the parallels between Mary, Una, and all good Christian women. Chaste love requires marriage, and the passage clearly indicates marriage is fruitful, for Charissa is fertile (“ay if her babes”) and has borne many children of the chaste union.⁸⁴ She “embodies a fertility oddly distanced from sexuality...” Charissa’s babies are presumably the result of active sexuality, yet her maternal aspect overwhelms the scene.”⁸⁵ Cupid is connected to the word “wanton,” but Charissa’s breasts and neck are depicted as open and exposed to visitors, both male and female. The quick movement of verse from describing the exposure of a breast to its maternal

⁸¹ Richard A. Levin, “The Legende of the Red Cross Knight and Una: Or, Of the Love of a Good Woman,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31 no. 1 (1991): 18.

⁸² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.x.30.5-9.

⁸³ Richard A. Levin, “The Legende of the Red Cross Knight and Una: Or, Of the Love of a Good Woman,” 18.

⁸⁴ For further information about correlations between the Virgin Mary and maternity see Frances Dolan, “Marian Devotion and Maternal Authority in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 282-292.

⁸⁵ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*, 32.

function, suckling children, strips Charissa of the sexually laden connotations of the line and emphasizes the functionality of her body. As Book I draws to a close, the emphasis shifts from that of a virgin in need of protection to a young maiden moving into her next important phase and role in life, that of wife and mother. Charissa embodies Una's future self—what she will be once she weds Red Cross. Una will become a chaste wife and mother, her fertility will be necessary to carry forth the dynastic legacy of her family, and she will take on the motherly persona of Mary and teach her children.

Una represents a complimentary relationship between secular and divine values through her behavior. She uses a veil and countenance of seriousness and sorrow as a way to defend her virginity against the many threats thrust upon it throughout Book I. Una's plight in the woods acts as a warning for female readers regarding the perils of young ladies traveling outside the home, while at the same time providing a pious model for how a maiden should behave if she finds herself in a similar situation. However ideal her behavior may be, Una is unable to protect her own virginity. She is constantly saved in Book I; her defensive virginity is passive and therefore unsuccessful. The love relationship between Una and the Red Cross Knight ends up being a chaste one, and their betrothal promises an idyllic Protestant marriage. In order to achieve the model marriage, however, Una must maintain her virginity and follow the example set for her by the Virgin Mary and extolled by Jerome and Vives. All three of these models praise virginity as an ideal state, but the early modern utilization of the Virgin Mary and Vives's *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* presents virginity as a temporary state for women on their way to marriage and motherhood. Una is the epitome of the early modern ideal

woman; she is quiet, subservient to male authority, and virtuous. She knows her limitations and abides by them, a feat that wins her the arm of the Red Cross Knight and makes her an exemplum and excellent instructive model for feminine behavior.

Book I presents a clear emphasis on virginity over chastity. Although the union between Una and Red Cross is foreshadowed early in Book I, Una's descriptions and behaviors are modeled after those of her medieval virgin predecessors, and her encounter with Satyrane highlights her future role as mother. Una is frequently referred to as a virgin and discussed in terms of her "virginitie." Spenser even desexualizes Una's impending marriage to the Red Cross Knight by drawing correlations between the Virgin Mary as the mother of God, Charissa, and Una. Una's behavior parallels Mary's example as set forth in *Vives*—*Vives* uses the Virgin Mary as an example of proper female behavior throughout his conduct book—making Una's character more akin to virgins of the Middle Ages. As Una's character portends, Book I is the Book of Holiness. But by Book III, Spenser's emphasis has changed to one of female chastity rather than virginity, as the title of the book proclaims—Book of Chastity. Like earlier books, Book III turns on the experiences and quests of a knight who represents a moral virtue, but in this case, the knight is female.

It is not surprising that the Knight of Chastity, Britomart, is female, for chastity is a distinctively female concern in *The Faerie Queene*. There is no unease, for example, created by the Red Cross Knight's lapse in chastity when he lustfully follows Duessa while turning away from Una, or by Artegall's physical attraction to Radigund. The behavior of these men is not virtuous or chaste, yet the narrative does not expect male

behavior to be virtuous or chaste in a sexual sense. Virginity and chastity are only important when they are descriptors of women. Spenser's methodology in writing *The Faerie Queene* calls for a knight to represent the moral virtue of chastity. Since the chastity of men is not apropos to Spenser's discussion of chastity, the Knight of Chastity must be female.

Nevertheless, femininity and knighthood are not natural partners. Spenser develops a knotty proposition by writing his Knight of Chastity as female. Knighthood's associations with masculinity, action, and power stand in opposition to the example of female conduct set by Una in Book I. The paradoxes between ideal womanhood and Britomart's knighthood place her in a precarious position: "Even though she serves as the titular knight for the 'female' virtue chastity, Britomart can only enact this role from a position of 'manliness.'"⁸⁶ The push and pull of her dual function as an exemplum of female chastity and a knight becomes the impetus of Books III through VI.

At first glance Britomart appears to be Una's opposite in almost every way. She is a warrior who wears armor rather than a veil, she is active rather than passive, and she breaks many rules regarding proper female behavior. Una presents an idealized woman modeled on the Virgin Mary as described by Vives, whereas Britomart shows a more human struggle between emotions and social codes of conduct.⁸⁷ Shelia Cavanagh eloquently describes the issues Britomart's character calls into question:

⁸⁶ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*, 139.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Heale mentions Britomart's humanness in *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide*, 79. John C. Bean discusses chastity as a form of restrained spontaneity (a human trait) in "Cosmic Order in *The Faerie Queene*: From Temperance to Chastity," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 17, no. 1 (1977): 67-79. Leslie Brill also highlights the human qualities of Britomart's love in "Chastity as Ideal Sexuality in the Third Book of *The Faerie Queene*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11, no. 1 (1971): 15-26.

Britomart's complex pursuit of her man, if not only explicitly of her virtue, responds brilliantly to the convoluted demands of Elizabethan chastity. The chaste knight's luck, her ignorance, and her serious gender confusion enable her to conform to a multitude of complex behavioral requirements, such as modesty, innocence and neutralized sexuality. Her exemplary status, however, coheres only at a transcendent allegorical level. At the literal level, her narrative generates contradictions, not a clear paradigm of chastity.⁸⁸

Cavanagh's words point to the deep disparities within Spenser's construction of Britomart as an example of proper female behavior. But when one recalls that according to Spenser *The Faerie Queene* is instructive in nature, there must be a lesson to take from Britomart's form of chastity. Some clear paradigms of chastity exist within her character, and the ultimate lesson readers learn from Britomart is not that different from what they learn through Una: the power of virginity is short-lived and unsustainable in the long-term.

Una and Britomart, despite their different personas, end up at the same place—the altar. Like Una, Britomart practices defensive virginity throughout her adventure, but Britomart's method of adhering to codes of female conduct varies from Una's in many ways, and Britomart practices an active defensive virginity, unlike Una. The disparity in the two characters relates to Elizabethan culture's further movement from its Catholic heritage and ideas about virginity by the later 1590s (the last 3 books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in 1596), the presence of a life-long virgin queen on the throne, and the continued lack of a cultural place for virginity. Una personifies a societal ideal that foregrounds virginity, while Britomart foregrounds chastity.

⁸⁸ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*, 142.

Books III through VI reflect the displacement of the virgin, for in them “wedded chastity emerges as a particular strategy for privileging the marital union in a social formation that has traditionally idealized celibacy and virginity.”⁸⁹ Chaste marriage was the cultural ideal for early modern women, but

Queen Elizabeth’s unique and anomalous existence poses a special problem for Spenser’s Protestant epic—and in these problems we see how her unique sexual status causes him great trouble because he writes in service of a specific social program.⁹⁰

That social program is one in which chaste marriage is the priority, and chaste marriage can only be achieved when a maiden remains a virgin until marriage. These cultural influences further the confusion Britomart’s character evokes (even 400 years later) as Spenser seeks to promote chaste Protestant marriage while at the same time recognizing—as any good courtier should with an elderly, female, virgin queen on the throne—that to negate any and all female authority is not in his best political interests. All of these factors—Elizabeth’s virginity, England’s Reformation and the disenfranchisement of the virgin—culminate in the later books of *The Faerie Queene* as Spenser continues to reimagine what virginity might look like while taking those issues into account. Britomart does present the audience with a different type of virginity, and she embodies a more active aspect of defensive virginity, but despite the dissimilarity between the characters of Una and Britomart, Britomart’s story concludes in the same manner as her saintly, virtuous predecessor, and she marries. Britomart not only marries,

⁸⁹ Bruce Boeher, “‘Carelesse Medestee’: Chastity as Politics in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*,” 557.

⁹⁰ Maureen Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 177.

but she also surrenders all her power to her husband, a rhetorical move that in effect negates her masculine qualities and renders her defensive virginity unsuccessful as well.

Since the emphasis with Britomart's character is on her chastity rather than virginity, for astute readers, Britomart's eventual surrender to Artegall comes as no surprise. Britomart simply modifies and manipulates female codes of behavior rather than rejecting them outright, yet at the same time she and Una share certain essential codes of conduct. Like Una's feigned serious and sorrowful countenance at the start of Book I, Britomart's period of sorrow by the ocean is a deep emotional sadness that the knight displays through actions, rather than just appearances. Una begins her journey with the accompaniment of the Red Cross Knight who acts as her chaperone, while Britomart's nurse chaperones her. Britomart's veil is her armor, as opposed to Una's literal veil. Moreover, both women seek to protect and defend their virginity. The main distinction between them arises from Britomart's power and autonomy; Britomart's chastity is "essentially aggressive," while Una's is essentially passive.⁹¹ Rather than needing a protector like the Red Cross Knight or Lion, Britomart becomes her own defender by taking on a masculine disguise. She is not reliant on anyone else; her defensive virginity is assiduous and, at times, aggressive.

The motivations for Britomart's quest vary from those of Una. Una accompanies the Red Cross Knight on his mission to rid her kingdom of a terrible dragon, traveling with her knight for protection. Britomart, on the other hand, sets out on a quest of her own accord. She leaves home first to seek Merlin's advice about the image she sees in

⁹¹ Leslie Brill, "Chastity as Ideal Sexuality in the Third Book of *The Faerie Queene*," 15.

her father's mirror (her future husband) and again to track down her destined spouse, Artegall. Britomart wanders beyond the safe confines of her home with a purpose, but that purpose is purely her own; she leaves to find love, which will lead to marriage. Britomart's move is bold and defies the advice of conduct writers such as Vives. Vives instructs young ladies that "it is nat comely for a mayde to desire marriage and moche lesse to shewe her slefe, to longe therefore."⁹² This makes Britomart's defiance of Vives's advice greater than Una's, for Britomart wanders into the outside world by her choice. Una's foray into the outside world, on the other hand, is not based on her desire to marry or seek out her love. Unlike Una, Britomart is too impatient to wait for Artegall; rather, she actively seeks him.

At first Britomart's journey looks much like Una's journey. Una begins her travels with the Red Cross Knight as her chaperone and guardian. This presentation of Una's character is more in line with medieval views of women:

The medieval lady should be protected by the knight, for she is incapable of caring for herself. The Virgin Mary prays, pleads, and implores through her mercy. Unlike the soldier, she does not challenge fight or demand.⁹³

Una embodies the vulnerable and passive woman Vives hold up as an example of ideal female behavior, an example based on the Virgin Mary; she must be protected at all times by someone (or something) else. When Red Cross abandons her, she must rely on wild beasts for safety. The knight and animals are active defenders of Una's virginity.

⁹² Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, 76. Caroline McManus also notes Britomart's defiance of Vives's instructions; see page 119 of *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Reading of Women*.

⁹³ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern England*, 71-72.

Britomart is unlike the medieval lady in that she takes an active role in defending her virginity, as her choice of companion highlights. Glauce, Britomart's nurse and companion, is an older woman who can not wield a sword, and she certainly is no wild beast. She is incapable of physically defending Britomart's virginity. In short, her protection of Britomart is purely symbolic and spiritual in nature. Britomart has no need for Glauce's bodily aegis. In contrast to Una, Britomart has the necessary skills and knowledge to defend and protect herself, and she uses them. Glauce, then, is a spiritual guide for Britomart rather than a physical protector, as she provides emotional support to the knight through encouragement and comfort during their adventure.

The genesis of Britomart's need to find Artegall is an experience she has at home with Glauce. Britomart looks into her father's mirror, and Artegall's image appears, inciting lovesickness in the young maiden. Britomart's agony is such that Glauce, who frequently refers to Britomart as her daughter, "offers her a catalog of negative exempla to define her desire against what it is not, beginning with the incestuous Myrrha and ending with bestial Paisphae."⁹⁴ Britomart does not see that her love is different from the examples Glauce sets forth, for she is unable to recognize the providence of her destiny with Artegall. The only thing the Knight of Chastity sees is that these lovers get the love they want, and she wants to be with Artegall. Glauce is wise and experienced enough to recognize the significance of the chaste love Britomart has for Artegall, but Britomart is unable to understand the many variants of love at this point in the narrative. Her lovesickness continues, and Glauce tries to cure Britomart, "but none could find, / Nor

⁹⁴ This occurs in *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto ii, stanza 41. Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 142.

herbes, not charmes, nor counsel that is cheife, / and choisest med'cine for sick harts reliefe."⁹⁵ Frustrated by the inconsolability of her charge, Glauce suggests that the pair visit Merlin, the sorcerer who made the mirror, in order to discover the identity of the man Britomart saw in it.

Although the two women venture out together, it is obvious Glauce is ill equipped to fend off any threats to Britomart's virginity. The very fact that they leave as a pair suggests that "the future knight and her nurse support the poem's implied message that neither an unaided nor 'womanly' woman would be able to represent or defend this important female virtue."⁹⁶ This belief is the catalyst for the disguises the women undertake when they leave to seek out Artegall—Britomart as a knight and Glauce as her squire. Glauce's place as a symbolic and spiritual guide rather than protector is underscored by her subservient role as squire. Based on Glauce's awareness of her inability to defend her young charge's virginity should a threat to it arise, it is she, a mother figure to Britomart, who constructs and initiates the disguises:

That therefore nought our passage may empeach,
Let vs in feigned armes our selues disguise,
And our weake hands (need makes good schollers) teach
The dreadful speare and shield to exercise.⁹⁷

Glauce goes on to flatter Britomart, reminding her of her royal blood, her large stature ("large of limbe") and natural skill at martial arts. She rattles off a list of successful female warriors—Bunduca, Guendolen, Emmilen and Angela—to show Britomart the

⁹⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.5.3-5.

⁹⁶ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*, 147.

⁹⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.53.1-4.

martial maiden she can become.⁹⁸ In these words “generous stout courage did inspire,” and Britomart agrees to trade her gown for chain mail and “aduent’rous knighthood.”⁹⁹ Glauce recognizes that “Britomart’s disguise, in fact, does not protect her from male control, since cross-dressing as a knight is to a large extent the means through which she will eventually find her husband, Artegall.”¹⁰⁰ However, the disguise will protect her from bodily threats to her virginity until she is married, for once she weds Artegall, she will surrender her armor and he will become her protector. Because Britomart travels with an old woman rather than a knight, she needs more than a veil on her body for protection; she needs armor. For Britomart, the armor acts like Una’s veil, saving her for the *one* man who will become her husband, instead of saving her from *all* men.

Glauce helps Britomart recover from a bout of sorrow she suffers from by the seashore, and this recovery allows the knight to continue on her quest to find Artegall.

The nurse reminds Britomart of her lineage and destiny as a motivation:

...old *Glauce* gan with sharpe reprieft,
 Her to restrain, and giue her good reprieft,
 Through hope of those, which *Merlin* ad her told
 Should of her name and nation be cheife,
 And fetch their being from the sacred mould
 Of her immortall womb, to be in heauen enroll.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.54-56.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, III.iii.57.4, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Frye, “Of Chastity and Rape: Edmund Spenser Confronts Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 363.

¹⁰¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iv.11.4-9.

Not only is Britomart foretold to marry Artegall, but their marriage also results in the birth of a royal line of children which includes Queen Elizabeth. Glauce is aware of the importance of Britomart's quest; she must find and marry Artegall in order for Merlin's predictions to come true. With Glauce's guidance, Britomart recognizes the role of divine providence in her life. Once Britomart accepts her dynastic function as mother of a royal line, she is no longer in need of Glauce's inspirational stories.

Glauce's last guiding act on behalf of Britomart is perhaps her most important one, for her last deed on Britomart's behalf is what unites Britomart with Artegall. This, in turn, ensures Merlin's prophecy will become a reality and the royal line will come to pass. The fateful meeting occurs in Book IV, Canto vi. Scudamour and Artegall happen upon one another, start to fight, then realize they are both looking to settle scores with Britomart—Scudamour thinks Britomart stole the love of his betrothed Amoret, and Artegall is trying to locate her because she beat him at a tourney. Scudamour and Artegall run into Britomart and begin fighting with her. In the heat of battle Britomart's gender is revealed, as is Artegall's identity. Glauce counsels each knight, and encourages them to make peace with one another; she also advises Artegall and Britomart to love each other. Glauce encourages the couple to spend time together talking and getting to know one another. This follows Vives' assertions that husbands and wives should be companions, which Vives relates back to Adam and Eve:

After that god the prince and maker of thus excellent worke, had brought man into this worlde, he thought it inconvenient to leave hym all alone, and so joined to hym a lyvyng creature, moste lyke unto hym of mynde and shappe: with whose conversation and compendable wordes, he might sweetly spende his tyme: and also by cause of generation, if hit pleased hym. And in dede wedlocke was nay

ordeyned so moche for generation, as for certayne company of lyfe, and contynuall fellowship. Neither the name of husbände is a name of bodily pleasure, but of unite and affinite.¹⁰²

Vives acknowledges that if the basis of a successful marriage is not sexual desire, then there must be some type of connection between the lovers. This connection must be in the form of friendship, and in order to form that type of bond, people must get to know one another. Glauce forces Britomart and Artegall to speak to one another, and through their conversations, their chaste love blossoms. Happily, just a few short stanzas later the couple is betrothed. Her purpose fulfilled by providing spiritual guidance to Britomart, securing the union of the two young lovers, and facilitating the realization of a dynastic prophecy, Glauce drops from the narrative. Once Britomart is betrothed and under the protection of her future husband, Glauce is unnecessary as either a female chaperone or an inspiration in Britomart's quest to find Artegall.

Obviously, Britomart does locate Artegall, but throughout her travels to find him, she must wear some type of protective gear to guard her virginity. Britomart's protective clothing is armor, which replaces the veil worn by Una. Glauce and Britomart's recognition that the young maiden must have some type of shield covering her body demonstrates that they are well aware of the dangers to virgins who venture out on quests. By dressing in armor "Britomart hides her sex...since 'femaleness' thwarts virtue in men and because undisguised women often attract charges of seduction."¹⁰³ The motivations for Britomart's quest stem from love, but meeting Artegall without her

¹⁰² Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, 87.

¹⁰³ Shelia Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*, 139.

virginity intact would be counterproductive for her end-goal of marriage. In that vein, the armor further symbolizes Britomart's active form of defensive virginity, as it indicates she will physically fight to defend her virginity. Britomart's armor differentiates Britomart's active defensive virginity from Una's passive form of defensive virginity, but in some ways her armor functions similarly to Una's veil—it protects her from view, hides her gender, and it can incite desire through the mystery of hiding what lies beneath the cloth.

The armor's veil-like function is exemplified in Book III, Canto i at the Castle Joyous. Britomart approaches the castle only to find six knights battling the Red Cross Knight. He explains the issue at hand: "These six would me enforce by oddes of might, / To change my lief, and loue another Dame."¹⁰⁴ Britomart learns that the lady of Castle Joyous has a rule:

But if he haue a Lady or Loue,
Then must he her foregoe with fowle defame,
Or els with vs by dint of sword approue,
That she is fairer, then out fairest Dame.¹⁰⁵

The reward is the Lady of the castle's love. Britomart assists the Red Cross Knight in defeating the six knights. In her victory, Britomart has won the lady of the castle, but at this point, Britomart does not comprehend exactly what, or whom, she has won.

Britomart and the Red Cross Knight are led into the Castle Joyous for a celebration; however, the milieu of the castle is disconcerting for Britomart.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.i.24.2-3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, III.i.27.1-4.

Britomart's chaste, focused love sharply contrasts with the openness, sexuality, and frivolity of the castle. In an environment such as the Castle Joyous, bodies are seen as vessels of pleasure; it is "a world where love is a game. The inhabitants indulge in love as play, and accordingly they are not mature knights and ladies."¹⁰⁶ The castle provides the perfect setting for indulgence in sexual pleasures. As Britomart is directed through the castle, she is taken into a room that contains a tapestry depicting a sensual love scene between Venus and Adonis. Around the chamber

Many beds were dight,
As whylome was the antique worldes guize,
Some for the vntimely ease, some for delight,
As pleased them to vse, that vse it might:
And all was full of Damzels, and of Squyres,
Dauncing and reueling both day and night,
And swimming deepe in sensuall desyres,
And *Cupid* still emongst them kindled lustfull fyres.¹⁰⁷

The room is designed for women and men to engage in sexually promiscuous behavior. Beds are placed around the room for ease of use. Women and men dance in the room; there is music and merriment within the castle chamber. Spenser places Cupid in the scene as well, reinforcing the notion that the joys found within Castle Joyous are carnal in nature and founded on bodily lust as opposed to love. Britomart observes all of lasciviousness in the castle and is revolted by it, yet she is still unaware she is in grave danger. Spenser portrays Malecasta, the lady of the castle, as a physical embodiment of the salacious environment of Castle Joyous. The outward representation of Malecasta's

¹⁰⁶ Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 68.

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.i.39.2-9.

unchaste behavior is seated in the descriptions of her eyes: “Her wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed, / Did roll too highly, and too often glaunce, / Without regard of grace, or comely amenaunce.”¹⁰⁸ Her eyes are exposed; their visibility and roving nature symbolizes Malecasta’s lust-driven life.

The armor, acting as a veil for Britomart, covers her eyes to further emphasize the chaste nature of the martial maiden and her contrast to the lusty lady of the castle. When the Red Cross Knight and Britomart are led into a bower to be disarmed, Britomart fears her gender will be revealed if she shows her entire face, so she only “let[s] her goodly visage to appere.”¹⁰⁹ Britomart’s attractiveness is such that by just lifting her visor, her beauty incites desire. The heightening of lust through the unmasking of Britomart’s eyes shows that when the female face is bare, the male reaction is lust. While the unchaste Malecasta willingly exposes her wanton eyes, Britomart hides her chaste face. The lifting of Britomart’s visor is also parallels the removal of Una’s veil in Book I, Canto iii:¹¹⁰

As when fayre *Cynthia*, in darksome night,
Is in a noyous cloud enueloped,
Where she may finde the substance thin and light,
Breakes forth her siluer beames, and her bright hed
Discouers to the world discomfited;
With thousand blessings she is heried;
Such was the beautie and the shining ray,
With which fayre *Britomart* gaue light vuto the day.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.i.41.7-9.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., III.i.42.9.

¹¹⁰ Roche notes that the light which emerges from the removal of Britomart’s armor is akin to the illumination that follows when a veil is removed, but he does not discuss the parallel between Una’s veil and Britomart’s armor. See Thomas Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, 56-57.

¹¹¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.1.43.

The brilliant light of her beauty—as opposed to the wanton, sinful eyes of Malecasta—illuminates the room, just as Una’s beauty shone in Book I. This illumination comes from the inner virtue that shines through the bodies of female virgins, although “the armor itself is coded male in Spenser’s culture.”¹¹² In spite of the fact that Britomart’s radiance is an outward expression of her chastity, in the licentious environment of Castle Joyous, her chaste radiant beauty incites desire. In this particular incident, the desire she evokes is misplaced. The *Lady* of the castle becomes enraptured by Britomart’s attractiveness instead of the knights, since all present think she is a man because she wears armor.

Britomart’s rejection of Malecasta and her sexual advances, paradoxically, places her virtue and virginity in peril. The assault on her virginity comes at night (much like the attempted violation of Una in Book I), while she is sleeping and most vulnerable. Malecasta does not need to penetrate the room; she boldly breaches Britomart’s bed. When Britomart wakes due to the violation, shrieks ensue, and Malecasta’s knights, along with the Red Cross Knight, run into the room:

Halfe armed and halfe vnarmed, with them attons:
 Where when confusedly they came, they fownd
 Their lady lying on the sencelesse grownd;
 On thither side, they saw the warlike Mayd
 Al in her snow-white smocke, with locks vnbound,
 Threatning the point of her auenging blaed,
 That with so troublous terror they were all dismayd.¹¹³

¹¹² Judith Anderson, “Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration, *English Literary History* 39, no. 1 (2009): 76.

¹¹³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.i.63.3-9.

The beauty of Britomart shocks the knights and Malecasta. She is described in terms of “whiteness,” alluding to her complete purity. Additionally, the white imagery is used “...to symbolize the singular power of chastity as a positive force Spenser uses the image of light breaking through an obscuring veil.”¹¹⁴ Her virtue and beauty stop Malecasta’s knights in their tracks: “None of the rashly durst to her approach, / Her succourd eke the Champion of the bloody Crosse.”¹¹⁵ Britomart’s chastity and skill as a warrior work together to intimidate the men who threaten her virginity, and she takes a defensive stance to protect it. At this moment of her unveiling, “Britomart is an intimidating figure to defeat or desire; her version of agency suggests not that bodies are veiled or displaced by acts but that both are insistently present, complicating the conditions of male response.”¹¹⁶ Britomart’s act of defensive virginity is so out of place and unexpected in this environment, that the men in the story are baffled by her. They are unsure of how to respond to this virgin who is clearly in a place where she does not belong, just as virgins have no designated place in early modern society. This point is exemplified by the reaction of Gardante, one of Malecasta’s knights. Gardante, overcome with emotion, stabs Britomart’s side.¹¹⁷ The cut is deep enough to bleed but not so deep that it is fatal. The image created by the wound is of the red blood from Britomart’s wound leaking onto her “lily smock.” The blood on her white undergarment emphasizes the real threat of

¹¹⁴ Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Unkindly Flame*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.i.64.8-9.

¹¹⁶ Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*, 147.

¹¹⁷ Some critics view Britomart’s wound as a symbol of suffering for love. Roche claims the wound is “Britomart’s initiation into the realities of love.” See Thomas P. Roche, Jr. “The Challenge to Chastity: Britomart at the House of Busyrane,” *PMLA* 76, no. 4 (1961): 70. Leslie Brill claims “the events which lead up to her wounding...suggest that Britomart’s vulnerability results from a temporary displacement of her sexual energy towards lust, a slight wavering of her chastity.” Leslie Brill, “Chastity as Ideal Sexuality in the Third Book of *The Faerie Queene*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11, no. 1 (1971): 20.

sexual penetration Britomart faces by venturing into the outside world as a virgin when there is no safe place in the outside world for virginity.

Because of the peril maidens face in the outside world, Vives cautions them to travel with a “sadde” companion as another way to stave off lustful men and protect their virginity. A serious or sorrowful demeanor, according to him, acts as another barrier between men and women. The example Vives cites is a story about the Virgin Mary: the lady’s sorrow was able to quell the heat of male lust “as though a man had caste a fyre brande in to the water.”¹¹⁸ In Book I, Una’s sorrowfulness is extrapolated by the narrator; he observes Una’s veil, black stole, and countenance. These observations lead the narrator to conclude that Una is sad, though the character’s words do not support such a reading. Britomart expresses sorrow when she arrives at the seashore in Canto iii of Book III, but her sorrow is active and physical, not passive. She is truly sorrowful, not simply appearing as such. The narrator relates Britomart’s complaints to the audience, which go on over the course of three stanzas (8-10). This is followed by Britomart’s self-reflective realization that her sorrow must be contained and removed from sight: “She shut vp all her plaint in priuy griefe; / For her great courage would not let her weepe.”¹¹⁹ Britomart’s armor does not allow her to display her misery. In Britomart’s case, unlike Una and Mary, sorrow can not quell lust, since the armor desexualizes her, but sorrow and melancholy may certainly lead to death, as emotions interfere with the martial mindset of knights.

¹¹⁸ Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, 59.

¹¹⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.11.2-3.

As noted by Wendy Olmstead, when Britomart laments to the ocean in stanza eight, “she sees herself as a victim of the sea.”¹²⁰ Britomart’s words are those of a woman who is suffering. She complains to the ocean:

Huge sea of sorrow, and temptuous greife,
Wherein my feeble barke is tossed long,
Far from the hoped hauen of reiliefe,
Why doe thy cruel biollowes beat so strong,
Any thy moyst mountains each on others throng,
Threatening to swallow vp my fearefull lyfe?¹²¹

Britomart feels frail in comparison to the ocean, and the picture created by her words calls to mind something small being overcome by a greater force, which further demonstrates the physicality associated with her sorrowfulness. Her sorrow is “huge,” immeasurable and vast like the sea. Britomart’s need to unite with Artegall causes the maiden anguish. The obstacles in her way produce upheaval and push her onto one trail and then another; all of this leads her to feel as though she is in the middle of a tempest fed by grief. The forces of nature that appear to be against Britomart seem insurmountable as she stands in front of the ocean, aware of her insignificance and powerlessness to change nature’s course.

Like other knights in *The Faerie Queene* who must learn lessons through their quests, Britomart has much to learn. The lesson she must learn from the ocean is how to overcome the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness she feels while standing on the beach. Her body is imagined as a boat that is unable to stay afloat. It is a “feeble vessel

¹²⁰ Wendy Olmstead, “Elizabethan Rhetoric, Ideology, and Britomart's Sorrow by the Sea,” *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14, no. 1 (2002): 176. Olmsted also discusses the relationship between Britomart and her depiction of herself as a boat on the ocean.

¹²¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iv.8.1-6.

crazed, and crackt.”¹²² The pilot of her damaged vessel “hath a restless minde,” and she fears it “[c]annot endure, but needes it must be wrackt / On the rough rocks, or on the sandy shallowes, / The whiles loue it steres, and fortune rowes.”¹²³ These descriptions work together to create a distinct image of physicality—that of the small, damaged boat being tossed about by the all-powerful and tumultuous sea. Furthermore, “her complaint that the frail ship of her life will be devoured by waves...displays her anxieties lest she be swallowed and absorbed by passion or steered wrong by uncertain fortune.”¹²⁴ Her anxieties and worries are predicated by what she considers a questionable outcome for her romance, even though Merlin’s vision of the future guarantees Britomart’s success, a type of providence for chaste love. However, if love is Britomart’s pilot and fortune is helping guide her ship to its destination, how does Britomart come to play an active role in her destiny?

Britomart’s situation, with its strong emphasis on destiny, parallels the providential tale of Constance told by Spenser’s predecessors such as Chaucer, John Gower and Nicolas Trivet, with one major defining difference. In these earlier stories, the rudderless boat, a symbol for providence, is not set on the water by the character whose future is in question. Chaucer’s Constance, for example, is put out to sea by her pagan mother-in-law, a move motivated by hatred and jealousy.¹²⁵ Britomart metaphorically places *herself* on the ocean by falling in love with Artegall. Her love for

¹²² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iv.9.1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, III.iv.9.3-5.

¹²⁴ Wendy Olmsted, “Elizabethan Rhetoric, Ideology, and Britomart’s Sorrow by the Sea,” 181-182.

¹²⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” in *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 71-85.

Artegall is initiated when she looks into her father's mirror, a deliberate and intentional act. Once she looks, sees her future husband, and falls in love with him, the emotional energy generated by Britomart's love is redirected into action through her quest to find and marry the man in the mirror. Thus Spenser updates a trope of godly devotion and providence (the ship guided by providence in the sea) into an allegory of the power of chaste love. Chaste love and marriage, as opposed to Cupidic love, guides lovers to shore safely, fulfilling both the social and religious standards for correct love.¹²⁶ Britomart's chaste love is somewhat like the pure love Una harbors for the Red Cross Knight, but Britomart's active pursuit of her foretold husband is a sharp contrast to the passivity of Una. Spenser's Knight of Chastity does not model Mary in this aspect, nor does she follow in the footsteps of any medieval virgins, for the emphasis on her character resides in her chastity rather than her virginity. The story of Constance, which Spenser clearly parallels in Britomart's moments by the sea, is altered and retooled to highlight chaste, but fertile, love and marriage as evidence of God's providence.

Spenser's reimagination of the Constance story includes a heavy emphasis on marriage as well as an alteration of the female heroines; Constance's passivity is updated with Britomart's assiduousness. Britomart learns a lesson about faith during her moments on the seashore—faith in the divine providence of chaste love, rather than the divine providence of God alone (the lesson emphasized in medieval versions of the

¹²⁶ John C. Bean defines Cupidic love best: "Within the Cupidic tradition, love is a form of 'frenzy' in which the lover is possessed by the daimon Cupid and is lifted 'outside himself' toward higher forms of being. Cupidic lovers...feel that they are surrendering their lives to powers originating outside themselves, and they frequently long for ecstatic existence beyond the finite state of ordinary mortals. See John C. Bean, "Making the Daimonic Personal: Britomart and Love's Assault in the *Faerie Queene*" *Modern Language Quarterly* 40 (1979): 239-240.

Constance story). As Britomart looks out across the ocean, taking in the sheer power of nature's force, her anxieties intensify. She briefly abandons her active role in an emotional moment and relinquishes control of her destiny to the wind by asking: "At last blow vp some gentle gale of ease. / The which may bring my ship, ere it be rent, / Vnto the gladsome port of her intent."¹²⁷ Her mistake here is to align her future with fortune rather than providence, since fortunes alter and change. She must have faith in the providence of chaste love. Chaste love is endorsed by God, especially a chaste love that will produce an English monarch (Britomart and Artegall are the line from which Queen Elizabeth descends in the poem). Merlin's assertion that Britomart and Artegall's relationship is destined by providence makes her quest one of faith as well as chastity. In fact, Britomart's recollection of her faculties comes from the gentle reminder, given by her nurse, that even if the course to an ideal Protestant marriage may not be smooth sailing, chaste love will always triumph as an act of providence. In this way, Artegall becomes a rallying cry of sorts, a motivation for Britomart to take up her arms again and move forward on her quest in order to fulfill their destinies.

Britomart does not have any male protectors during her quest, and at times, she acts as a guardian for maidens during the narrative, effectively taking on the male role of protector. This directly violates Vives warnings about martial maidens:

Hit can nat lightly be a chaste mynde, that is occupied with thinking on armour, and turnay, and mannes valiance. What placis amonge these be for chastity unarmed and weake? A woman that useth those feates drynketh poison in her hert: of whom this care and these wordes be the playne sayenges: This is a deedly sickenes, not yet ought

¹²⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iv.10.3-5.

to be shewed of me: but to be covered and holden under, let hit hurte other with the smell, and defile them with the infection.¹²⁸

Vives's book was published in English during Henry VIII's reign, but Spenser, writing to honor an aged virgin queen who (by default of her title) headed the British military, could hardly turn away from the image of a female warrior, especially since his herald of chastity was required to be a knight by his own plot device. For this reason, the armor acts as a disguise which allows Britomart to practice her martial arts without exposing herself as a woman. Britomart makes a place for chastity that is armed and unarmed through her defense of other virgins in the epic; most notable is her rescue of Amoret, the kidnapped fiancé of Scudamour.

In this scene, Britomart's chastity and virtue makes her the only person capable of saving Amoret, who is being held captive by the evil sorcerer Busirane. The task, according to Scudamour, is impossible: "Ne canst ayde, ne canst her foe dismay."¹²⁹ Britomart feels empowered by her sense of purpose and destiny; she also understands Scudamour's desperation to find and unite with his love. After all, she experienced the same despair by the sea. Scudamour, despite his reluctance, continues with Britomart in hopes of finally freeing Amoret. When they arrive at the House of Busirane to attempt the rescue, they find the porch is blocked by "A flaming fire, ymixt eith smouldry smoke, / And stinking Sulphure."¹³⁰ The two brave knights recognize that the fire foreshadows

¹²⁸ Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, 24.

¹²⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.11.7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, III.xi.21.6-7.

the extreme peril into which they are about to enter, but they attempt to move through the flames anyway. Britomart goes first, and

through she passed, as a thunder blot
Perceth the yielding ayre, and doeth displace
The soring clouds into sad showres ymolt;
So to her yold the flames, and did their force reuolt.¹³¹

Britomart's ability to pass through the fire unharmed is due to her chastity.¹³² Her chastity acts as a protector; her sorrow, which was transformed into hope on the seashore, provides her protection too. Despite Britomart's efforts to quell the sorrow and anxiety in Scudamour and convert that energy into determination (as Glauce did for her at the ocean), Scudamour lacks faith in chastity. He does not trust Amoret, and he questions whether their love is true. His failure of faith and belief in female chastity leads to his inability to pass through the fiery porch at the house. Britomart, having learned her lesson well at the seashore, applies her new knowledge, which allows her to cross through Busirane's fiery trap.

Upon entering the House of Busirane, Britomart is greeted with several more tests of her chastity, and she is bombarded with visual images of lasciviousness. Initially, she crosses into a room with rich tapestries lining the walls. These tapestries, like the ones Britomart saw at the Castle Joyous, depict images of lust and Cupidic love. In the "vtmost room" the wall hangings show "many faire pourtraicts, and many a faire feate, /

¹³¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.25.6-9.

¹³² Donald Cheney also asserts that Britomart is able to walk through the flames because "she is protected by her 'chastity,'" but he does not explain how she is protected by her chastity. Donald Chaney, "Spenser's Hermaphrodite and the 1590 *Faerie Queene*," *PMLA* 87, no. 2 (1972): 195.

And all of loue and al of lusty-hed...And eke all *Cupids* warres they did repeate.”¹³³

Essentially, the art shows Cupid manipulating the gods into “debas[ing] themselves in the pursuit of love.”¹³⁴ In addition to images woven into the tapestries, the gold threads used in the design are emphasized and compared to a snake:

Yet herem and there, and euey where vnawares
It shewed it selfe, and shone unwillingly;
Like to a discolourd Snake, whose hidden snares
Through the greene gras his long bright burnished back declares.¹³⁵

All of these images—the abundance of gold, Cupid and the snake—are images of overindulgence. The gold in the tapestries is correlated with a snake, calling to mind the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Although Eve was warned not to eat from the tree of life, the snake tempted her into following her natural curiosity and eating the fruit. The snake was cunning in his manipulation of Eve, and Spenser represents the cunning nature of the snake through the gold thread by highlighting the way the gold “feigns;” the gold wants to be seen but acts as though it does not want to be seen. Like the snake in the Garden of Eden, the gold slithers in and out of the weaving, catching the eye and curiosity of the viewer. The evil intentions of the gold, like the snake, are hidden, but the coloration—which is described in fiery terms as “bright *burnished*”—acts as a visible warning of the dangers that follow a lack of self restraint (emphasis mine).

Cupid’s ability to manipulate gods into behaving badly denotes the influential nature of Cupidic, lust-based love. If powerful gods such as Jove and Apollo are unable

¹³³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.29.2-3, 5.

¹³⁴ Thomas P. Roche, Jr., “The Challenge to Chastity: Britomart at the House of Busyrane,” 343.

¹³⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.28.5-9.

to remain reasonable and chaste when Cupid tempts them, then how difficult must it be for humans to remain rational and in control of their emotions? Even Britomart is pulled in by the beauty of the art adorning the walls in the House of Busirane. She is captivated by the images: “Ne seeing could her wonder satisfie, / But euermore and more vpon it gazed, / The whiles the passing brightnes her fraile senses dazed.”¹³⁶ As she looks back beyond a statue of Cupid, she sees the phrase “*Be Bold*” above the door and is unable to decipher the meaning of those words. Britomart studies the words, “Yet she could not find what sence it figured.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, she recalls her purpose for entering the House of Busirane and moves into the next room.

The next room contains wall art as well, and the scenes depicted in the next set of tapestries show how Cupidic love weakens strong and powerful men. To reflect the debauchery shown in the art, the display is “richlier by many partes arrayd: / For not with arras made in painefull loome, / But with pure gold it was all ouerlaid.”¹³⁸ The wall hangings show “mightie Conquerours and Captaines strong” surrendering to lust-driven love. Cupidic love weakens warriors, these representations suggest. Spenser emphasizes the effect this type of destructive love has on strong and powerful men through his colorful descriptions: “Their swerds and speres were broke, and hauberques rent / And their proud girlonds of tryumphant bayes / Troden in dust with fury insolent.”¹³⁹

Furthermore, he directly ties the fall of these once great men to the wrong type of love:

“A thousand monstrous formes therein were made, / Such as false loue doth oft vpon him

¹³⁶ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.49.6-9.

¹³⁷ Ibid., III.xi.50.5.

¹³⁸ Ibid., III.xi.51.2-4. A.C. Hamilton (editor of *The Faerie Queene*) suggests these figures are embossed or in bas-relief. (397, note 4-6 for Stanza 51).

¹³⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.52.5-8.

weare, / For love in a thousand monstrous forms doth appear.”¹⁴⁰ Their downfall lies in their inability to determine true (chaste) love from “false” (Cupidic) love. The tapestries in the House of Busirane show that Gods and great men can easily become victims of lust-based love. This type of love consumes its victims and transforms them negatively because there is no faith and, consequently, providence with Cupidic love. This point is highlighted by the pictures of gods and great men toppling down from their positions of power, thus creating an image of the powerful falling from the pinnacle of fortune’s wheel in the absence of faith, providence, and chaste love.

Britomart takes in the art that surrounds her, but her chaste heart renders her unable to interpret the Cupidic phrase she finds written above two of the doors: “*Be Bolde, be bolde*, and euery where *Be Bold*” and “*Be not too bold*.”¹⁴¹ The urgings of the words and art are puzzling to her; the pictures and words do not connect. For her being bold is about resisting temptation and remaining chaste rather than giving in to bestial temptations. Her confusion about Cupidic-based love mirrors ideal feminine behavior as Vives describes:

Lucian the rhetorician enduceth Venus asking her sonne Cupide, what is the cause, that whan he woundeth with his darte of love, bothe Juppiter, Neptune, Apollo, Juno, yea and her selfe to his owne mother, and finally all the goddis, yet doth he nat ones meddell with Pallas, Diane, and the Musis? Wher unto he answereth: Pallas, sayth he, thrteth me, when I come towarde her, and resisteth and withstandeth the occasions. Nowe the Musis be ful of virtuous reverence, and ever occupied with some virtuous labour...And Dian runneth about in the woddess and desertes, and so she can nat love, bycause she feelth company.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.51.7-9.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., III.xi.54.3 and 8.

¹⁴² Juan Luis Vives. *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, 73.

Britomart's chaste love embodies aspects of Pallas, Musis and Dian—she resists other men and is able to stave off lustful feelings, while her role as a knight fulfills her time and allows her to defend virtue. Moreover, Britomart's armor removes her from the company of the opposite sex metaphorically, much like Dian. Cupidic love, a type of love she can not comprehend, drives the lover to pursue the object of his or her affections as a conqueror, whereas chaste love encourages a more recursive relationship between partners; Britomart is immune from Cupid's arrows and unable to understand his words ("Be Bold"), as she is virtuous and her love is chaste.

In a scene reminiscent of Britomart's experiences at the Castle Joyous, the knight's sleep is violated at the House of Busirane, but this time, rather than awaking to find herself the object of an attempted seduction, she is roused to observe a masque depicting the violation of a young virgin at the hands of a man motivated by Cupidic lust. The masque "is meant to show the typical progression of a love affair (the pattern being courtly love) from its beginnings in pleasure and ease to its cruel end in infirmity, poverty, and '*Death* with infamie.'"¹⁴³ A parade of various spirits moves through the room during the masque, but the magnum opus of the drama occurs when Amoret, Busirane's captive, appears. She enters the room on the arms of Despight and Cruelty, part of the courtly love tradition. According to the tradition:

cruelty is a personification of the metaphor of the cruel mistress or cruel love common in sonnets, and similarly Despight is derived from the medieval 'despitous' lady.

¹⁴³ John C. Bean, "Making the Daimonic Personal: Britomart and Love's Assault in *The Faerie Queene*," 245-246.

Amoret's main tormenters are the very qualities which have preserved her chastity during her courtship...¹⁴⁴

Customarily, women played the roles of Despight and Cruelty, but in the masque, Amoret is the victim of Despight and Cruelty. These emotions become contextualized in an alternative way, and lose their relevance to courtly love in the House of Busirane, a home infected with lust and carnal desire. In this environment, which continues to parallel the Castle Joyous, Cruelty is personified as brutality rather than the flirtatious taunting of a mistress, and Despight becomes violence rather than a playful rebuff. With Amoret arm in arm with Cruelty and Despight, Busirane goes on to penetrate the purity and chastity of her breast and heart: "(The worke of cruell hand) was to be scene. / That dyde in sanguine red her skin all snowy cleene."¹⁴⁵ The contrast of the red blood on Amoret's white breast is a visual representation of the violation of her chastity. Amoret's heart is removed from her body by "a deadly dart."¹⁴⁶ The dart, which is both Cupid's and Busirane's (since he orchestrates the masque), corrupts her chaste love and takes from her the most essential organ needed to live—her heart. Cupid appears in the room and removes his blindfold to see his "proud spoile" and most recent conquest, further reinforcing Amoret's role as a victim in the masque. Because Amoret is pure of heart and chaste in her love for Scudamour, the corruption of her emotions and heart is only possible through Busirane's magic. Conversely, it is the very love Amoret has for Scudamour that allows such a

¹⁴⁴ Thomas P. Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, 75. A.C. Hamilton (401, note to Stanza 19) and Elizabeth Heale (*The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide*, 95) share Roche's interpretation.

¹⁴⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xi.20.8-9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III.xi.21.3.

violent and evil penetration of her heart, since it is uncorrupted and free from Cupidic love—a blank slate for Busirane’s evil deeds.

Britomart is determined to save Amoret, even though it means endangering her chaste and pure heart, the very thing that makes her vulnerable to Busirane’s evil. The nighttime setting of this incident further exposes Britomart to corruption, as she is “invulnerable to male attack while cross-dressed as a knight yet vulnerable to attack within the bedroom and torture cell.”¹⁴⁷ She is susceptible to attack in the bedroom because the main threat to her comes in the form of sexual violation, which usually takes place in a bedroom. The bedroom thus functions as a torture cell, housing a literal shop of horrors in the eyes of Britomart—the immoral tapestries, the perverted masque, and now an impending fight with the mage Busirane. Busirane takes out a knife, intent on corrupting Britomart’s heart just as he defiled Amoret. Once again, harkening back to the bedroom scene at Castle Joyous, Britomart is wounded by the knife of a corrupt man:

Vnawares it [the knife] strooke into her snowie chest,
That litle drops empurpled her faire brest.
Exceeding wroth therewith the virgin grew,
Albe the wound were nothering deepe imprest,
And fiercely forth her mortall blade she drew,
To giue him the reward for such vile outrade dew.¹⁴⁸

The injury Britomart sustains mirrors the wound give to her by Gardante at the Castle Joyous, and the white purity of the young maiden is for a second time emphasized through the visual image created by Spenser’s language. The “empurpled” blood

¹⁴⁷ Susan Frye, “Of Chastity and Rape: Edmund Spenser Confronts Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queen*,” 371.

¹⁴⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.xii.33.4-9.

contrasts with the “snowie” whiteness of Britomart’s chest, symbolizing the brutal threat of male violation and unchaste love. Interestingly, Spenser uses the word “virgin” in this stanza. In Book III, Britomart is rarely described as a virgin and typically defined by her chastity (she is, after all, the Knight of Chastity). But at this climatic moment, Spenser’s word choice changes, and this alteration is significant, for it stresses that Britomart, like all good ladies, must remain a virgin until marriage. If she does not, she will be tainted, another object in Busirane’s world of carnal desires. The one true vulnerability of Britomart, despite her knighthood, is the threat against her chastity and virginity that occurs at night in the bed chamber.

Britomart’s experience in the House of Busirane is not confined to her exposure to the evils of Cupidic love; she also finds positive reinforcement of her defensive virginity and ability to defend the virtue of others there. Unlike Una, who must find protectors wherever she can, from wild lions to satyrs and fawns, Britomart protects herself from harm and is able to rescue other young maidens in need, actively defending virginity and chastity wherever she goes. She even rescues Artegall, who is enslaved at the kingdom of Radigund; this brave act also contrasts with Una, who is powerless to rescue the Red Cross Knight without help from the House of Holiness.¹⁴⁹ Britomart has faith in the knowledge that she will marry Artegall; it is her destiny, an act of providence, and her faith in this emboldens the young maiden actively seek to fulfill that destiny.

¹⁴⁹ Bowman states that Britomart is not rescuing Artegall but winning him back from a foe. For more on that argument, see Mary R. Bowman, “‘She There as Princess Rained’: Spenser’s Figure of Elizabeth,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1990): 516. However, this argument does not logically follow since Britomart and Artegall are destined to marry; there is no true competition for Artegall’s affections.

Britomart's faith in her future with Artegall is strengthened by her experience at the Temple of Isis. Her virginity and chastity allows the knight to enter the magical space of Isis's Temple, just as it got her past the flames at the gates of the House of Busirane. Spenser states that the priests living at the temple are "by vow of their religion / ...tied to steadfast chastity."¹⁵⁰ They sleep on the ground to "enure them selues to sufferance thereby / And proud rebellious flesh to mortify."¹⁵¹ Britomart follows suit, lying down, helmet off, to sleep on the bare ground before the statue of Isis. The parallel between the celibate priests and Britomart's chastity is exemplified by the similarities between their sleeping arrangements. They both show their purity and humility by sleeping on the floor. In turn, their suffering helps them grow in their relationship with divinity. Britomart's chastity and adherence to the priests's traditions opens her soul to receive a prophetic dream about her future.

In the same way that chaste love becomes infused with God's providence at the seashore, the providence of chaste love triumphs over religion at the Temple of Isis as well; a chaste marriage is Britomart's future, and this is exactly what she dreams about in this holy place. In the dream, the crocodile resting under Isis's foot awakens and consumes flames that threaten her. The flames begin as a "holy fire" but then

...all the embers strow
 Vppon the ground, which kindled priuily,
 Into outrageous flames vnawares did grow,
 That all the temple put in iepopardy.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, V.vii.9.6-7.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, V.vii.9.4-5.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, V.vii.14.5-8.

Chaste love, personified by the fire, transforms into something uncontainable and dangerous. The flames of passion are too intense and threaten to destroy all the goodness and virtue of chaste love. As A. C. Hamilton points out, the flames represent Britomart's misguided love from Book III, Canto ii and allude to the flames at the house of Busirane.¹⁵³ Britomart overcame her lovesickness, and through her realization of chaste love she was able to navigate her way past the fiery porch at the House of Busirane.

Next, Britomart must impart an understanding of chaste love to her future husband. Her task in rescuing Artegall from the clutches of Radigund is to impart the lesson of chaste love to him; this is what will prevent him from falling prey to a seductress again, and it is what will guarantee the fulfillment of Merlin's earlier prophecies. The Crocodile—which symbolizes Artegall—saves Britomart from the flames in her dream by consuming them.¹⁵⁴ But in a strange turn of events, the Crocodile, unable to control his emotions and desires, turns to devour Britomart. Isis (mirroring Britomart) responds by beating the reptile back with her rod.¹⁵⁵ Her actions elicit an immediate response from the Crocodile:

Tho turning all his pride to humblesse meeke,
 Hem selfe before her feete he lowly threw,
 And gan for grace and loue of her to seeke;
 Which she accepting, he so neare her drew,
 That of his game she soone enwombed grew,
 And forth did bring a Lion of great might;¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ A. C. Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, 555, note 7 for Stanza 14.

¹⁵⁴ For more on the statue as a piece of art (as well as art within the poem in general) and the crocodile's sexual nature, see Adam McKeown, "Looking at Britomart Looking at Pictures," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45, no. 1 (2005): 43-63.

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, V.vii.15.9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, V.viii.16.1-6.

Isis's reaction teaches the crocodile that his behavior is inappropriate. The pure heart of Britomart (Isis) restrains the beastly desires hidden deep within Artegall (Crocodile) and brings them under control. It is only through the chaste love of a virtuous woman that man or beast can be tamed, and this is reflected in the crocodile's reaction to Isis's reprimand. A true and chaste love results from the interaction, and their love quells the flames of irrational, destructive passion. The couple act as balance and counter-balance to one another: Artegall's propensity for earthly beauty is contained by Britomart's warrior nature. She is beautiful, yet she also has the physical and emotional power to control, and even defeat, her lover. They need one another, for their love has a distinct dynastic purpose—to procreate and spawn the lion, a symbol of the royal Tudor line, thus fulfilling Merlin's prediction.

Britomart's dream seems to indicate that she might have some control over her husband, at least temporarily, but in a moment foreshadowing Britomart's later relinquishment of power, Spenser devotes an entire stanza in Book V restating his claim that women must live under the rule of men:

Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,
 When they haue shaken off the shamefast band,
 With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,
 T'obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,
 That then all rule and reason they withstand,
 To purchase a licentious libertie.
 But vertuous women wisely vnderstand,
 That they were borne to base humilitie,
 Vnlesse the heauens them lift to lawfull soueraintie.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, V.v.25.1-9.

There is a clear message within these lines—women should live under the rule of men, unless they happen to be Queen Elizabeth I. With Elizabeth's royal exception duly noted ("lawfull soueranie"), all other women should, according to the epic, fall under male rule, even those who are capable of defending their virginity. The problem, these lines claim, occurs when women shake off the "shamefast band." A. C. Hamilton's note explains the phrase "shamefast band" as the "bond of modesty, i.e. bonds that restrain from shame."¹⁵⁸ I suggest that the "shamefast band" in this context also refers to marriage bands. Spenser goes on to mention that wise "Nature" binds them (man and woman) together, an allusion to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The concept of man ruling over woman harkens to Genesis, in particular Genesis 3:16: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly increase thy sorrows, and thy conceptions. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thy desire *shall be subject* to thine husband, and he shall rule over thee."¹⁵⁹ The bands of marriage, like chaste love, are ordained by God as stated in the Bible. Women who reject marriage reject male rule; this is a choice that renders these women as unnatural and immoral in their defiance of God's word.

Radigund is such a woman; she is described as a queen and warrior, but her designation as an Amazon is most indicative of Spenser's negative view of women like her. For Elizabethan audiences, the term "Amazon" was associated with unnaturalness. Amazons were horrifying symbols of powerful women since they were believed to murder, maim, and demean men by enslaving them; it was also thought that Amazons

¹⁵⁸ A. C. Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, 543, note 2 for stanza 25.

¹⁵⁹ Gn 3: 16 GV.

murdered their own male children.¹⁶⁰ They were unnatural in that they refused male control, and their behavior went against the teaching of the church, both Protestant and Catholic. For Spenser, the thought of these aberrant, Amazonian women gaining and exerting power over men is too much. The Amazon figure is too powerful and too unnatural to become the new face of life-long virginity; the only time a woman should rule anything alone is in the case of a queen who is divinely appointed by God—a queen like Elizabeth. In all other situations, and for all other women, a role of power and leadership along with perpetual virginity must be exchanged for marriage and child bearing, which is why Radigund must die. Britomart seeks to annihilate Radigund without a second thought, a reaction based on the imminent threat Radigund presents to society as a whole. Radigund's power to rule her kingdom, her attitude towards men, and her apparent refusal to marry places her within the realm of the Amazonian warrior princess, a realm Spenser does not want to align life-long virginity with, making her a threat that must be thwarted.

Radigund's defeat is the most emblematic moment in *The Faerie Queene*, for with her defeat, chastity triumphs over virginity. The battle between Britomart and Radigund rivals the bloody scene Britomart views at the House of Busirane when Busirane rips out Amoret's heart. Spenser's descriptions highlight the goriness of the battle:

So long they fought, that all the grassie flore
Was fild with bloud, which from their sides did flow,

¹⁶⁰ Mary R. Bowman, "'She There as Princess Rained': Spenser's Figure of Elizabeth," 521-522 and Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*, 13.

And gushed through their armes, that all in gore
 They trode, and on the ground their liues did strow,
 Like fruitles seede, of which vntimely death should grow.¹⁶¹

The imagery here is full of violence and blood—the women’s blood colors the grass, yet they continue to fight regardless of their injuries. Earlier in the poem Britomart’s small wounds are portrayed as virtually inconsequential. Moreover, the blood from her wounds functions to enhance the whiteness associated with her purity. Now, as Britomart reaches the end of her long journey and her life as an unmarried virgin, the emphasis shifts to the threatened loss of her fertility, rather than her purity, represented by free flowing blood pouring from her body on the battlefield.

The blood that hits the ground carries with it the potential of fertility.¹⁶² Spenser alludes to this connection in his use of phrases such as “on the ground their liues did strow” and “fruitless seed.” In the early modern period, menstrual blood was believed to be “the key to achieving pregnancy.”¹⁶³ While menstrual blood is not directly mentioned in the passage above, there is a clear and direct connection between blood in general, menstrual blood, and fertility, based on early modern medical practices. Galenic humeral theory, which according to a recent study by Bethan Hindson was still “widely accepted in the Elizabeth period,” outlines the relationship: “Blood, produced in the liver from liquidised food, was considered the most vital of the humors, and it was believed that blood formed the basis of all elements of the body. Two of these elements were sperm

¹⁶¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, V.vii.31.5-9.

¹⁶² Judith Anderson also notes the “sexual and generative” nature of the battle in “Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration,” 93-94.

¹⁶³ Bethan Hindson, “Attitudes Towards Menstruation and Menstrual Blood in Elizabethan England,” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (2009): 90.

and menstrual blood.”¹⁶⁴ As blood gushes onto the battleground, precious menstrual blood goes with it; Britomart’s fertility, and the future of England, is in jeopardy, for a decrease in menstrual blood represents a decrease in fertility.

The potential loss of fertility through the spilling of blood is particularly vital in regards to Britomart and her ability to carry out her dynastic function as the wife of Artegall and mother of the Tudor line. The shift in focus from the threats to Britomart’s virginity to the threats to her fertility bring to light an important fact: her virginity is “not...an end in itself, or a definition of her total identity, but as a means to survival until the time is right for her to submit to a larger, dynastic role.”¹⁶⁵ Britomart’s dynastic role is not as sole ruler, or even as wife to the king. Her most important dynastic role is as child bearer; she will give birth to the Tudor of monarchs, as Merlin’s prophecy predicted.

Britomart does, of course, defeat Radigund. However, it is not enough to kill her; the kingdom Radigund ruled, a kingdom in which women hold the power, must be returned to a natural state. While Artegall’s enslavement occurs due to his inability to impart justice on beauty, Britomart “neither upbraids or cajoles Artegall, and is anxious for his sense of dignity, she is careful to leave men in charge of the Amazon kingdom,”¹⁶⁶ restoring rightness and order to a place of disorder. This ends the power of the Amazon and emphasizes the fact that there is no culturally sanctioned place in a post-Reformation society for women who do not want to marry. Once the happy couple is

¹⁶⁴ Bethan Hindson, “Attitudes Towards Menstruation and Menstrual Blood in Elizabethan England,” 92.

¹⁶⁵ Donald Cheney, “Spenser’s Hermaphrodite and the 1590 *Faerie Queene*,” 197-198.

¹⁶⁶ Kathleen Williams, *Spenser’s World of Glass: A Reading of The Faerie Queene* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), 171.

reunited and married, order is restored to Radigund (the kingdom bears the name of its fallen leader). According to Spenser, that natural order includes male rule, for it is only under male rule that order may be reinstated: "...and them restoring / To mens submission, did *true Iustice deale*" (emphasis mine).¹⁶⁷ True justice means men are in positions of power, and women fall under their rule. Thus, the martial warrior who at first seems unlike Una and exhibits an active form of defensive virginity, in the end, meets the exact same fate—marriage and disempowerment.

The Faerie Queene presents its audience with two very different women in Una and Britomart, yet these women continue to demonstrate proper female conduct of the period, as evidenced by the correlations between their actions and the advice of Vives. After all, they are, as Spenser's Introductory Letter states, instructive models for proper behavior. Una is saintly, passive and submissive, while Britomart is an active warrior. The defensive virginity practiced by these maidens reflects their differences as well. Una's defensive virginity is passive; she must be defended by others, while Britomart's defensive virginity is active and even aggressive at times; she defends her virginity without relying on others. Regardless of these binaries, both women engage with conduct standards of the time: they cover themselves with veil and armor, they are exposed to dangers that may befall women who venture out into the world, they show that a woman needs a companion and protector, but most importantly, Britomart and Una demonstrate that the proper role of a woman, whether powerful and active or saintly and

¹⁶⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, V.vii.42.6-7.

passive, is that of wife and mother. Lifelong virginity is not an option for anyone other than the heavenly endowed Queen, and defensive virginity in this text is not enough to prolong a woman's virginity for a time or prevent marriage. By foreshadowing a spouse for Una and Britomart early in their stories, Spenser limits defensive virginity to an act that is only capable of maintaining a maiden's virginity until she marries her predestined husband.

Una and Britomart are not unique in their trajectory to marriage; rather, they are typical of the virgins in *The Faerie Queene*. Almost all of the myriad virgins in *The Faerie Queene* end up marrying someone, or at least betrothed. Only a handful of characters are able to remain virgins, and those women fall under special circumstances; Belpheobe, the votaries of Isis, and Chrysogenea are the only life-long virgins within a text that purports to promote virginity.¹⁶⁸ Belpheobe, as queen, is above the common people and not subject to the laws of everyone else, as her right to rule comes from God. The votaries of Isis are allowed to remain virgins because of their monastic vows, and their vows are respected only because they represent an old, pagan religion. Chrysogenea "has a magical quality;" her pregnancy occurs through an immaculate conception.¹⁶⁹ No ordinary woman can remain a virgin unless there are extenuating circumstances. Virginity in *The Faerie Queene* is only defended because it leads to chaste marriage, not because it is an acceptable state of existence.

¹⁶⁸ David Scott Wilson-Okamura, "Belpheobe and Gloriana," 47.

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth D. Harvey, "Spenser, Virginity and Sexuality," in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*, ed. Patrick Chaney, Andrew Hadfield and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 108.

This revelation—the death of life-long virginity as a possible choice and station for women— develops and becomes more overt over the course of the text. In Book I the model for Una is her medieval virgin predecessors. Una mirrors the behavior of Mary as described by Vives, and there is a constant emphasis on the maiden's virginity throughout Book I. By Book III, the image of virginity has another face: Britomart. Britomart is strong, dresses in male armor, and acts as Spenser's Knight of Chastity. She is vastly different from Una in this sense, and the impetus behind Britomart shifts as well; she is usually referred to in terms of her chastity rather than virginity. Both women practice a form of defensive virginity, but marry at the end of their respective stories. However, there is directness to Britomart's story; her entire quest is one of securing marriage.

The real turning point for Spenser, it seems, occurs in Book III. This is exemplified by the discussion of Belphebe, which reflects the view that life-long virginity is a thing of the past. In Book III, Canto v Belphebe is praised as a "faire ensample...Of chastity."¹⁷⁰ Later in the same canto Spenser writes: "For thy she standeth on the highest staire / Of th'honorable stage of womanhead, / That Ladies all may follow her ensample dead."¹⁷¹ Maureen Quilligan notes that the 1561 OED citation of "dead" means "utmost," so "Spenser is praising Belphebe's utmost example of absolute virginity. But he is also saying that it is dead."¹⁷² The example Belphebe presents to women is applicable only if that woman happens to be Queen Elizabeth. For all other women, life-long virginity is no longer an option because there is no designated place in

¹⁷⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.v.1 and 4.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., III.v.6-9.

¹⁷² Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser, the Politics of Reading*, 189.

early modern culture for them to fit in. The social, religious, economic, and dynastic conditions of the period do not allow for life-long virginity. Instead, virginity is simply a stage of life through which maidens pass through on their way to marriage. To further this point, in the next canto Spenser moves away from his discussion of Belpheobe to focus on Amoret, the twin who will marry and procreate and whose upbringing occurs in a place filled with “life-breeding forces.”¹⁷³ Marriage and child-bearing are the only option available to women in *The Faerie Queene* who are not immortal or ordained by God; defensive virginity as a life-long state is not mentioned as an alternative to a productive and virtuous female existence as wife and mother, even for warriors like Britomart.

Defensive virginity emerges in early modern literature as a tactic used to gain control over a woman’s destiny, whether that control comes from rejecting marriage altogether, or just delaying it. *The Faerie Queene* is the earliest text in which a definitive occurrence of defensive virginity is apparent. In its burgeoning state, however, defensive virginity is not enough to evade marriage on its own. This highlights the rarity of a successful life-long defensive stance. Two of *The Faerie Queene*’s powerful women—Britomart as a warrior maiden and the saintly Una—are unable to escape marriage even while enacting defensive virginity because women must be brought under male rule in order to negate their potential power and ensure future offspring. In regards to the female characters of *The Faerie Queene* and the lessons they teach—as Spenser does claim the text to be instructive—the main focus is on virtue, marriage and child-bearing, much like

¹⁷³ Maureen Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser, the Politics of Reading*, 190.

Vives's conduct book. Even strong women like Britomart who practice defensive virginity for a time will eventually surrender their armor and sword to take their proper place in the home as a submissive wife and mother. The lessons to be learned from reading *The Faerie Queene* reflect the social codes of the period: good and virtuous women remain virgins for a time, but will marry. However, until they marry, defensive virginity acts as a mechanism that ensures their marriages will be pure and chaste.

CHAPTER II

STAGING THE CONVENT AS REFUGE IN *THE JEW OF MALTA* AND
MEASURE FOR MEASURE

We have seen how virginity changed over the course of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Una of Book I, a character based on stories about virgins and saints, looks different from Britomart, the Knight of Chastity, in Books III through VI. Although both women practice defensive virginity, Una passively and Britomart actively, they are betrothed or married by the end of their respective stories, making their defensive virginity successful only in protecting their virginity for marriage. In this chapter, I will examine another avenue through which defensive virginity is explored in literature—the stage. In particular, I am interested in the ways dramatists use the convent to explore the virgin's place in post-Reformation England. Several early modern plays use convents as part of their story although they were banned in early modern England —*The Jew of Malta*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, to name a few. This study focuses on two of those plays, *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure*, since the convent functions as a major component of their plots.¹

The cloister's prominence in these plays bears further investigation, for Shakespeare and Marlowe use the convent as a symbolic space through which they can explore female resistance on stage, a resistance that includes defensive virginity. The

¹ Darryl Gless notes a “unique...fixation” on monastic life in *Measure for Measure*. Darryl Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 64.

convent was a place where women who did not want to marry might live prior to the Reformation, but what might life look like for a woman who wanted to remain a life-long virgin outside the convent? Marlowe and Shakespeare explore that question (and others) in their plays through two virginal characters who experience life outside and inside the cloister, Abigail and Isabella. Ultimately, they suggest that defensive virginity, when it is tied to religion, is no longer compatible with life beyond the convent walls, as there are too many threats and hazards virgins must endure. In this way, nunneries in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* signify a site where defensive virginity may be practiced by two characters who, under very different circumstances, take advantage of the protection and bodily control afforded to them through the veil.

These dramas differ in their content, genre, and action; nevertheless, Abigail and Isabella reflect the ways writers were using literature to examine how the figure of the virgin might fit into a society in which she no longer held a position of power. In *The Faerie Queene*, it is evident to readers early on that Una and Britomart will marry; there is never any doubt they will become wives. However, the presence of the convent in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* presents another possibility for maidens aside from marriage—the veil. The opportunity the convent presents to Abigail and Isabella is problematic in that the plays are not focused on the women's impending marriage, but rather on the potential stored within the virginal body, the potential of use. Because life-long virginity is feasible for Abigail and Isabella due to the presence of the convent, their potential becomes the focus of both plays, as men attempt to make use of that potential, leading both women to identify the convent as a safe haven, a place where their virginity

is protected. Outside the monastery, their words are not powerful and, ironically, they are silenced. *Measure for Measure* and *The Jew of Malta* use the convent as a safe place to investigate the complexity of issues surrounding virginity and female resistance in the period, but in the end they conclude that defensive virginity based in religion alone is not enough to allow a woman to remain a perpetual virgin in early modern England.

Given the ambiguous presentation of Abigail and Isabella, it should come as no surprise that the characters have garnered little positive critical attention. There is a significant amount of scholarly work on *The Jew of Malta* and Barabas (Abigail's father), but studies on Abigail are lacking. Furthermore, those critics who do mention Abigail focus only on her role as sacrificial victim, neglecting the complexity and insight a close reading of her character can bring to an analysis of the play. *Measure for Measure* has been deemed "one of the most problematic of the pre-romance comedies," a status frequently blamed on Isabella who, according to George Geckle, is the play's "critical 'problem.'"² The sparse criticism on Abigail and the mostly negative nature of scholarly writing on Isabella arises, in part, from the characterizations of both women, which oftentimes presents them as enigmatic in their desires to enter the convent. However, their assumption of the veil is not enigmatic when looked at as a form of defensive virginity.

An early modern audience would bring certain cultural values to a performance of *The Jew of Malta* or *Measure for Measure* that would impact their reactions to Abigail

² Marcia Riefer, " 'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member': The Constriction of Female Power in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1984): 158 and George L. Geckle, "Shakespeare's Isabella," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1971): 163.

and Isabella's defensive virginity and need for autonomy. Images of nuns remained powerful symbols within later Tudor, Elizabethan, and early Jacobean culture even though King Henry VIII's dissolution acts forced monasteries out of England. Given the swiftness and conditions of Henry's quick conversion to Protestantism, there was a sense among the people that the country might not remain Protestant for long, and "Catholic practices continued quietly during the later years of Henry's reign."³ Edward VI began moving England towards a more conservative Protestantism, but his reign was short enough for English Catholics to easily fall back into Catholicism when Mary Tudor assumed the throne for a brief period in 1553. She restored Catholicism as England's national religion and allowed some monasteries to re-open. This re-opening, however, was a brief pause, as Queen Elizabeth's assumption of the throne brought another transition—back to Protestantism—and in 1558 Parliament renounced papal jurisdiction, passed a new act of royal supremacy, and abolished mass under the direction of Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth's Secretary of State.⁴

England's official religion was in flux, so it is no surprise that in 1560 there were actually more people identifying themselves as Catholic than before the first monastic dissolutions in 1536; moreover, personal records document that in 1580 masses were still offered in homes around England and openly in York, Lancashire, Hampshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire.⁵ This evidence suggests that while England's official religion was Protestantism, many English continued to practice Catholicism, albeit in secret, well into

³ Roseanne Michalek Desilets, *The Nuns of Tudor England* (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 1995), 480.

⁴ Ibid., 496.

⁵ Ibid., 500 and 517.

the seventeenth century.⁶ Those “who excused or withheld themselves from Church of England services” were labeled “recusants,” but this line between recusants and those who converted to Protestantism was not always clear.⁷ Recusants were prosecuted only when their religious non-compliance (failure to attend Church of England services, for example) was noticeable.⁸ Frances E. Dolan explains:

“Church Papist,” those who conformed outwardly and occasionally while maintaining private observance of their Catholic faith, were subject to comment but not to the laws; nor were those whose neighbors chose not to pursue them. Since recusancy was more about public observance than private belief, many residual beliefs, inclinations, and observations persisted invisibly beneath the law’s scrutiny.⁹

Some of those observations and inclinations include a small number of nuns who chose, at the time of dissolution, to live with one another in England:

Larger groups who remained together include, among others, Elizabeth Throckmorton and several relatives from Denny who lived at the Throckmortons’ manor, Coughton Court; Jane Kyppax, prioress of Kirklees who retired to a house in Mirfield with four of her nuns [and] a group of Dartford nuns including Agnes Roper and Elizabeth Cressner who lived at Sutton at Hone.¹⁰

It is clear that although overt Catholicism was a dangerous practice, some Catholics were willing to risk everything to remain in England.

⁶ Desilets notes that in Richmondshire half the gentry remained Catholic as late as 1600. See *The Nuns of Tudor England*, especially page 500.

⁷ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38.

Other displaced nuns and monks did not eschew their choice of religious life during these turbulent times either, but instead of remaining in England, they found safe havens around Europe, still identifying themselves as English monastics. During the 1530s dissolutions, most of the nuns who asked for release from their vows were from small convents in significant disrepair at the time of dissolution. Only about fourteen percent of all released nuns requested dispensation.¹¹ Interestingly, the number of nuns requesting dispensation falls to virtually nil once those who lived in the dilapidated, small convents are removed from the count, a fact that stands in stark contrast to the trend of quick disbandment taking place on the Continent.¹² Clearly, English nuns took their vows and commitment to cloistered life seriously.

Convents, by their nature, also provided women an “honorable alternative to forced marriages and provided an effective escape from the the very real fears and dangers of childbirth.”¹³ In taking the veil, women were able avoid marriage without stigma, at least until the latter portion of the sixteenth century. The nunnery offered a choice, an alternative to marriage and a way for a woman to retain control and autonomy over her body. Indeed, nuns were the only women, especially in pre-Reformation England, “who could remain single and still earn high social esteem.”¹⁴ Female monastics were well regarded because of their connection with the Virgin Mary and

¹¹ Dom David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, Vol. III, *The Tudor Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 311.

¹² *Ibid.*, 311.

¹³ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, “The Heroics of Virginit: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation,” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 41.

¹⁴ Sung-Won Cho, “Renaissance Nun Vs Korean *Gisaeng*: Chastity and Female Celibacy in *Measure for Measure* and ‘Chun-Hyang Jeon,’” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, vol. 1 (2004): 567.

sainthood through their vows of celibacy, as well as their devotion of God and the Catholic church.

Becoming a nun brought community respect, economic independence, and control over one's body, but these benefits came at a financial price. Dowries were required and taken "from a novice in almost every convent" prior to admission into their respective order, just as if the young lady were marrying a man.¹⁵ Additionally, women who became nuns were not legally allowed to inherit money or properties from their families. This did not always mean that cloistered women were completely cut off from their family's wealth. Sometimes families would "provide for her [their daughter's] material comfort with an endowment of money, property, or goods that would yield an annual income for the rest of her life," and monies or personal items could be bequeathed to nuns by their mothers, friends, and other relatives.¹⁶ The financial life of a female religious was by no means extravagant. For a woman capable of meeting the convent's dowry, this drop in income must have been a drastic change. Nevertheless, English women continued to join convents, leaving the comfort of wealth behind in order to live behind the convent walls, oftentimes to escape marriage.

Aside from offering women an alternative to marriage, convents additionally afforded them a sense of power.¹⁷ The cloister was a space where men, even bishops,

¹⁵ Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1964), 14. For information about dowries in *Measure for Measure*, see Natasha Korda, "Singlewomen and Poverty in *Measure for Measure*," in *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 159-191.

¹⁶ Roseanne Michalek Desilets, *The Nuns of Tudor England*, 78.

¹⁷ For more detailed information about female authority within convents see Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 31-74, esp. pages 64-74.

were not allowed to traverse.¹⁸ It was one of the few spaces where women controlled every aspect of household workings completely, were given the opportunity to rise in their careers, and held a respected position within the community, all while remaining celibate and unmarried. A nun was able to ascend through the ranks of the convent, provided she came from an established family and could navigate internal politics of convent life in order to get elected to a better post. Higher positions within the convent, such as abbess and prioress, required fiscal responsibility. Women in these positions of power were expected to balance budgets, allocate resources and conduct business, all of which often led them beyond the confines of the convent. Life in the convent also had benefits for nuns who were not in positions of power, as it freed them from the patriarchal rule of home—fathers, brothers or other male family members—while allowing them to retain a sense of autonomy and independence.

Because of the opportunities given to young women through the sisterhood within their walls, convents were targeted by the Reformation. Life-long virginity and monastic life had no place in a Reformation England, since that lifestyle prohibited marriage. Protestants came to associate celibacy with unnaturalness as a way to further distance themselves from Catholicism. Even Humanists, Catholic and Protestant alike, “questioned the value of the contemplative life, equating the active life with secular civic service, from which women were barred.”¹⁹ Male monastics who converted to Protestantism were frequently absorbed into other roles related to ministerial works, but

¹⁸ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, 16.

¹⁹ Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 421.

no such opportunity afforded itself to women. Acceptable roles for women became confined to those of wife and mother only, and females were removed, in Protestantism, from any active roles in religious life. These new ideas were “derived specifically from both Martin Luther’s and John Calvin’s contention that virginity was not a more spiritual state than matrimony,” but Luther and Calvin were not the only writers promoting marriage as a more holy state than life-long celibacy.²⁰

An English early modern book guidebook for households written by William Perkins, a Puritan reformer known as “the Calvin of England,” lists all the reasons why marriage is better than single life:²¹

...it is a state in it selfe, farremore excellent, then the condition of single life. For first, it was ordained by God in Paradise, aboue and before all other states of life, in *Adams* innocencie before the fall. Againe, it was instituted vpon a most serious and solemne consultation among the three persons in the holy Trinity. Genes. 1.26. *Let vs make man in our image, according to our likenesse, and let them rule ouer, &c.* Gen. 2.18. *Jehouah Elohim said, It is not good that the man should be himselfe alone, I will make him an helpe meete for him.* Thirdly, the manner of this coniunction was excellent, for God ioyned out first parents *Adam* and *Eve* together immediately. Fourthly, God gaue a large blessing vnto to estate of mariage, saying, *Increase and multiplie and fill the earth.* Lastly, mariage was made and appointed by God himselfe, to by the fountaine and feminarie of all other sorts & kinds of life, in the Commonwealth and in the Church.²²

Perkins’s ideas about marriage are representative of the ways in which Protestants viewed marriage in the period. He goes to great pains emphasizing the biblical reasons why marriage is better than the single life in God’s eyes, and lists four pieces of evidence to support his view of marriage. Each of these points relates to biblical scripture and

²⁰ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern England*, 11.

²¹ “The Works of William Perkins,” <http://www.williamperkinsworks.co.nr/> (accessed January 1, 2010).

²² William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie: or a Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Familie, According to the Scriptures*, trans. Tho[mas] Pickering (London: Felix Kyngston, 1609), 11-12.

teachings from Genesis. Perkins connects marriage back to Adam and Eve, our “first parents.” He also describes man’s creation in God’s image and woman’s later creation as a his mate, in order to imply that readers can enact God’s words directly by following the model set forth by Adam and Eve—a model of marriage and procreation. Obedience to God, based on God’s desire for men and women to “go forth and multiply,” can only be achieved by marriage, according to Perkins.

Perkins’s beliefs were not out of the ordinary; they reflect emerging sixteenth and seventeenth-century ideologies about marriage and family.²³ As the emphasis on marriage in early modern culture increased, the accepted role of woman became limited to that of subservient “helpe m[ate].” Perkins explains the marital relationship, and woman’s position in it, as thus:

Married folkes are either husband or wife. The husband is he which hath authorite ouer the wife; hereupon in Scripture he is called the *guide of her youth*, Prou. 2.17. and they twaine being but one flesh, he is also the head ouer his *wife*... The wife is the other married person, who being subiect to her husband, yeeldeth obedience vnto him.²⁴

Wives are clearly in a subordinate role in this passage; the husband has all the power, while his wife must obey him. He is to guide her, and although the two fleshs supposedly merge into one, there is still a differentiation in power structure: one mate is greater than the other. Additionally, “it is the wife’s status as ‘subject’ to her ‘ruler’ (husband) that determines her position in the marriage rather than her activity as a

²³ Several other early modern writers held the same views on marriage and female subservience in marriage: William Gouge, John Dod, Robert Clever, and William Whately. Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern England*, 99.

²⁴ William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, 123 and 129.

companion [or “helpe mate”] to her husband.”²⁵ Just as man is subject to the crown, woman is subject to her husband, and a good subject is an obedient one.

It stands to reason that if a good Protestant subject is an obedient wife, then a woman who rejects the reign of the ruler (or husband) is a heretical, treasonous villain. And this is exactly what happened; women who lived in convents were vilified. Negative perceptions of monasteries began to spread because monastics did not marry. Nuns were thought to go against God and nature in their refusal to marry, especially in a Protestant society that had “turned away from the monastic image of celibate women as brides of Christ.”²⁶ The negative publicity started with Thomas Cromwell’s visitations (1535-1536), the *Valor ecclesiasticus*, and *Comperta Monastica*,²⁷ which attempted to alter early modern perceptions of nuns and celibacy in England by vilifying monastics and monastic life. The charges laid by Cromwell in the *Valor ecclsiaticus* and *Comperta* were not entirely unfounded, but the majority of monks and nuns did not engage in any immoral or degenerate behaviors. Regardless of their untruths, these accusations instigated negative public opinion about monastic lifestyles, adding more fuel to the dissolution of monasteries that was already in progress. For those who were swayed by the antagonistic publicity, convents and monasteries came to be associated with sin, sex, idolatry, and popery. Yet given the fact that most nuns did not leave their convents willingly during dissolution (in contrast to trends on the Continent), and several communities re-established or established English monastic orders abroad after

²⁵ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern England*, 99.

²⁶ Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 434.

²⁷ The *Valor ecclesiasticus* itemized church revenues while the *Comperta* listed moral complaints against nuns and monks. See McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, 424.

dissolution, it is apparent that these allegations did not sway everyone's views of Catholic religious life.

Religious turmoil plagued England for many years, and the strife created by religious unrest became embedded in early modern culture, as evidenced by the literature of the day. Religion was a prominent theme in poetry, prose, and drama due to its cultural value and relevance. In particular, the tumultuous religious history of England gave playwrights a wealth of source material for their plays, while appealing to early modern audiences. Frequently, monks and friars function in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as avatars of the corrupt Catholic church. For example, the friar in George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* facilitates an extramarital affair between a married woman and Bussy; later in the play he conjures a spirit to foretell the future, an act Protestant audiences would find abominable.²⁸ Monks and friars made their way into scripts, but portrayals of nuns and convents in early modern theatre are not as common. Even though the dissolution of convents, like monasteries, was a major turning point in English culture, few plays broach the more controversial subject of female monasticism and celibacy as an integral part of the plot.

Marlowe and Shakespeare accept the difficult task of exploring the convoluted and emotionally charged topic of nuns and convents in *Measure for Measure* and *The Jew of Malta*. The convent, in these plays, ultimately comes to represent a locus of resistance, a place where Abigail and Isabella can seek refuge from the outside world and

²⁸ George. Chapman, "Bussy D' Ambois, in *George Chapman Plays and Poems*, ed. Jonathan Hudson (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 73-144.

the threats to their virginity. The threats to maidens's virginity are even more pronounced in these plays, in contrast to *The Faerie Queene*, since there is a chance Abigail and Isabella may be able to retain their virginity by entering a convent. These young women learn that the safest place to protect their virginal bodies from penetration and violation is the convent, not home. Both maidens are asked to sacrifice the one thing they hold dearer than life itself, their virginity, for the male authority in their lives, a request which is emphatically denied. Finally, Abigail and Isabella find their voices within the confines of the convent and see that their voices have the most authority when their words are written or spoken within the confines of the nunnery. In this way, Isabella and Abigail practice defensive virginity and draw authority from their status as virgins and women of the veil, but Marlowe and Shakespeare demonstrate their virginity only holds any power from behind the veil and within the cloister.

The worth of the virginal body works differently in these plays than in *The Faerie Queene* where the impending marriage of Una and Britomart is never in question. Marriage is not immediately forthcoming in the foreseeable future for Abigail or Isabella. Part of the virgin's power comes from her use potential, the fact that her body has not yet been used, and the imminent possibility of its use.²⁹ Since Abigail and Isabella are not on a path to marriage, their worth is inscribed in their untapped potential. As virgins who have the option of maintaining their virginity throughout their lives by way of entering the convent, their use potential has no predetermined end. Marlowe and Shakespeare

²⁹ Margaret W. Ferguson, Forward to *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 7.

highlight the value of Abigail and Isabella's untapped virginal bodies by frequently referring to them in economic terms. To assist audiences in connecting maidenhood with worth, *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* link women's bodies to jewels, and words like "diamond" and "ruby" become synonymous with virginal female bodies. Abigail and Isabella demonstrate that they are valued as pieces of property, which can be bought, sold or traded. This is shown not only through discussions of their bodies as pieces of wealth, but also by the men around them who exchange their bodies for power, money, revenge, and justice. The conflations of jewels with the virginal body that take place in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* only occur outside the convent, further suggesting that monasteries offer the only truly safe place for virgins, while the secular world has no place for them.

In *The Jew of Malta* the value of the virginal body is conveyed on stage with the interactions between Abigail and her father. More significantly, Barabas's actions towards Abigail indicate that she is part of his estate, a piece of wealth, in a different way than other dramatizations of father-daughter relationships in the period. Barabas is truly a villain in *The Jew of Malta*, as his name indicates. It was common for fathers to think of their daughters's marriages in economic terms; facilitating a financially advantageous marriage contract was certainly in the best interests of both father and daughter. But Barabas's use of his daughter to facilitate the murder of two young men by way of a marriage contract that he never intends to fulfill (a plan that relies of Abigail's virginity) exemplifies how he uses his daughter in whatever way necessary to achieve his goals. Barabas claims that he loves his daughter for much of the play, but as the play progresses,

he begins to view Abigail as one of his worldly possessions, which he wants to control completely. This realization comes after the Maltese council seizes Barabas's assets. He laments that they have taken

...all that I enjoyed;
And, having all, you can request no more—
Unless your unrelenting, flinty hearts
Suppress all pity in your stony breasts,
And shall now move you to bereave my life.³⁰

The only thing Barabas has left, according to his speech, is his life, but earlier Barabas counted three things he wanted the government to spare: his wealth, his daughter and his life. He still has two of those three things—his life, which he acknowledges, and his daughter, which he does not acknowledge. Barabas fails to recognize he still has his daughter because he is so distraught over the loss of his material goods. The exaggerated reaction he displays in response to his lost wealth reveals the emotional disconnect between Barabas and his daughter. If the Maltese government has a “stony breast” for taking Barabas's worldly possessions, then Barabas is depicted as more morally corrupt than the government in his failure to recall that he still has his only daughter. However, it does not take long for Barabas to realize that Abigail is the only investment he has left, and his other assets can only be recovered by her.

Abigail is the vessel Barabas uses to reclaim his “Infinite riches in a little room.”³¹ These riches, hidden by Barabas before the government takes his home and

³⁰ Christopher Marlow, *The Jew of Malta*, in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 1.2.140-144. All references to *The Jew of Malta* are taken from the Bevington Norton Edition unless otherwise noted.

transforms it into a convent, can only be rescued by Abigail, since men were not allowed entrance into nunneries. As Emily C. Bartels notes, when Barabas asks his daughter to complete this task for him, he turns Abigail and her Judaism into an “exploitable commodity, sending her as a convert into a convent to retrieve his hidden gold.”³² In act 2, scene 1 Abigail, in disguise as a petitioner in training for the sisterhood, finds the jewels and throws the bags of wealth down to her father as he yells, “Oh girl, oh gold, oh beauty, oh, my bliss!”³³ Barabas’s words point to his conflation of his wealth and daughter—the girl is the gold, both are beauties and bring him bliss.

An early modern Christian audience would have also recognized Barabas’s earlier reference to his “Infinite riches enclosed in a little room” as an allegorical allusion to Christ enclosed in Mary’s womb.³⁴ John Donne’s sonnet titled “Annunciation,” as Helen Gardner notes, has a similar set of lines: “...and shutt’st in little room, / *Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.*”³⁵ Although Gardner suggests Donne borrowed the line from Marlowe, G. K. Hunter offers a more convincing explanation for the similarity. Hunter argues that the relationship between big riches in a little room and the virginal womb “derive[s] from a tradition which gives resonance and meaning to Marlowe’s image, and sets Barabas’[s] treasure against the spiritual treasure represented by

³¹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.1.37.

³² Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 98.

³³ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.1.53.

³⁴ David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 265. For more information on alternative critical readings of this phrase see B.R. Menpes, “The Bondage of Barabas: Thwarted Desire in *The Jew of Malta*,” *Parergon: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 20, no. 1 (2003): 70.

³⁵ Helen Gardner, *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.), 60.

Christ.”³⁶ Hunter gives a litany of examples to support his argument, including Latin devotional prose and verse, its Middle English counterparts, Middle English poetry, Renaissance Latin poetry, and English Renaissance poetry.³⁷ Hunter further explains that “[t]he virgin’s womb was not only a ‘littel space’ but also infinitely rich in a monetary sense. The comparison of Christ to jewels, gold, silver, coinage is too obvious to mention;” examples may also be found in Job 28 and Proverbs 8.³⁸ Seeing Abigail rescue her father’s infinite riches brings the allegory to life. Abigail becomes both the Virgin Mary and Christ—Mary when she extracts Barabas’s wealth from its secret hiding place within the convent and Christ when she is sacrificed later in the play. Abigail’s virginity is key in making sense of this allegory, as well as the fulfillment of Barabas’s request, since her task of recovery relies upon a pure body full of use potential rather than a tainted one.

Abigail’s body continues to be referenced in economic terms throughout the remainder of the play, culminating in the humorous, yet disturbing, exchange between Lodowick, Mathias, and Barabas, where a “diamond” comes to represent her. Abigail’s use value, in terms of her marriageability, is reliant upon her virginity. In act 2, scene 3, Lodowick happens upon Barabas and decides to strike up a conversation with him in hopes of seeing Abigail. The content of the exchange quickly turns to wealth, diamonds specifically, and as Lodowick and Barabas discuss the terms of their “diamond”

³⁶ G. K. Hunter, “The Theology of Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*,” *The Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964): 222.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 223-224.

transaction, the quality (potentiality) of the “diamond” comes to the forefront of their deal:

LODOWICK. Well, Barabas, canst help me to a diamond?

BARABAS. Oh, sir, your father has my diamonds.
Yet I have one left that will serve your turn.
(*Aside*) I mean my daughter; but ere her shall have her...

LODOWICK. What sparkle does it give without a foil?

BARABAS. The diamond I talk of was ne’er foiled.
[*Aside*] But when he touches it, it will be foiled.
[*Aloud*] Lord Lodowick, it sparkles bright and fair.

LODOWICK. Is it square or pointed? Pray let me know.

BARABAS. Pointed, it is, good sir—(*aside*) but not for you.

LODOWICK. I like it much better.

BARABAS. So do I too.

LODOWICK. How shows it by night?

BARABAS. Outshines Cynthia’s rays.
(*Aside*) You’ll like it better far o’ nights than days.

LODOWICK. And what’s the price?

BARABAS. [*aside*] Your life, an if you have it. –Oh, my lord,
We will not jar about the price. Come to my house,
And I will giv’t Your Honor...³⁹

According to Barabas, his daughter, the “diamond” was “ne-er foiled,” “sparkles bright and fair,” is “pointed” (sharp) and will be liked “better far o’ nights than days.” In short, Barabas describes his daughter through the guise of a “diamond” as a virgin who is

³⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.49-68.

beautiful, smart, and ready for sex. Barabas assures Lodowick that she has never been used (“ne-er foiled”)—her use potential is yet untapped—an important factor in establishing her worth. Much like a diamond’s value that is dependent on its purity, Abigail’s value is predicated on her virginity as a guarantee of her potentiality. Lodowick is pleased with Barabas’s sales pitch, and the next question, naturally, turns to the exchange terms: “What’s the price?” During the entire encounter, Abigail is discussed in terms of her body: beauty, virginity, sexuality, and price.⁴⁰ Price, however, is tied to worth, and worth for women is contingent (as shown by Lodowick’s questions) on virginity.

Later in the same act and scene, Abigail is merchandised again as a diamond “in the middle of a slave market—to lure her suitors into a fatal competition with one another.”⁴¹ While looking to purchase a new slave, Barabas runs into Lodowick. Barabas tells Lodowick he has decided to allow Abigail to marry him: “As for the diamond, it shall be yours.”⁴² Immediately following Barabas’s proclamation to Lodowick, Mathias (another suitor) arrives and questions Barabas about his conversation with Lodowick. Barabas responds, “Tush man, we talked of diamonds, not of Abigail.”⁴³ Lodowick and Barabas speak about Abigail using the code word “diamond” in place of her name, further emphasizing the worth of her body and the ways in which a discussion of this type dehumanizes Abigail as an object instead of a person. This interaction contrasts with Barabas’s earlier conflation of his wealth with his daughter, in which there

⁴⁰ David H. Thurn also notes the use of the word “diamond” as a reference to Abigail in “Economic and Ideological Exchange in Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta*,” *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 2 (1994): 168-169.

⁴¹ Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe*, 98.

⁴² Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.3.155.

was a correlation between Abigail and Mary/Christ, and exemplifies Barabas's continued descent down a road of corruption and revenge, a path that leads him to view his daughter as an expendable commodity, much like a diamond.

The gem of choice throughout this scene is particularly interesting, as diamonds are gems that are mined and pulled from beneath the surface. The act of mining—removing something of value from hidden caverns underground—parallels the bags of riches Abigail removes from the foundation of her old home, which is also hidden and below the observable surface. Diamonds correlate with the allegorical reference to riches concealed in a little room as well, for diamonds are tiny gems encrusted in large masses of rock. Furthermore, Abigail's status as woman enclosed within her father's house and plots mirrors the way a diamond (Abigail) is sold by the miner/broker (Barabas) based on its purity, which determines the value. The marketing of Abigail's body vitiates her; Barabas talks about Abigail as he would a gemstone, not a daughter. Her feelings and emotions are ignored, and her body is bartered away without any regard for her sentiments or her consent. This is apparent a short time later in the scene, as Abigail is asked to "entertain" Lodowick but "keep her maidenhead."⁴⁴ The emphasis on maintaining her virginity highlights the importance of maidenhood in marriage negotiations, for if she were to lose her virginity, her worth, by way of her use potential, will be decreased. But these are not ordinary marriage negotiations; they are negotiations, motivated by revenge, that lead to the death of Lodowick and Mathias. Abigail obeys her father's wishes, but that moment is a turning point for the character,

⁴⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.231.

since “by using Abigail to bait Lodowick and Mathias, much as he would use precious gems to barter for services, Barabas unwittingly provides the rationale for his daughter’s conversion” later in the play.⁴⁵ Abigail’s second conversion, an act of defensive virginity, which I address later in this chapter, is facilitated by her defense of the most valuable gem she has, her virginity.

Measure for Measure’s Isabella, unlike Abigail, is aware of the value placed on her virgin body from the onset of the play. We are introduced to Isabella in the first act by her imprisoned brother, Claudio. Her introduction revolves around two things, her virginity and occupation: “This day my sister should the cloister enter, / And there receive approbation.”⁴⁶ From the beginning of *Measure for Measure*, Isabella is associated with her religious order: the Franciscan order of St. Clare.⁴⁷ Jessica Slights and Michael Holmes suggest that Shakespeare’s decision to make Isabella a novice within this specific order was “likely based on an awareness of the order’s reputation” for its asceticism, emphasis on chastity, poverty and silence, and resistance to patriarchal

⁴⁵ B.R. Menpes, “The Bondage of Barabas: Thwarted Desire in The Jew of Malta,” 79.

⁴⁶ William Shakespeare, “Measure for Measure,” *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1996) 1.2.177-178. All further references to *Measure for Measure* derive from the Riverside edition unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁷ Shakespeare appears to have a gap in the storyline regarding Isabella’s entrance into the convent. Although Claudio says Isabella has just entered the convent on that day for approbation, Lucio addresses Isabella as a novice in act 1, scene 4. In order for Isabella to be a novice, she would have been required to complete the probationary period of one year as outlined in *The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses Enclosid* (page 82). This document, editor Walter W. Seton states, is believed to have been written in the fifteenth century, in England, and it is “substantially the Rule of Blessed Isabella of 1263, as opposed to the Urbanist Rule.” See R. W. Chambers and Walter W. Seton, *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book and Two Fifteenth-Century Franciscan Rules* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner, 1914), 72. For a detailed explanation of the similarities between Francisca’s character and the rules mentioned in *Measure for Measure* as they relate to *The Rewle*, consult Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 262-264.

control.⁴⁸ An early modern audience, still processing England's numerous religious transitions, would have enough connections to Catholicism and a familiarity with convent orders that would enable them to make assumptions about Isabella's character based on the reputation of her order.

Isabella gains a certain amount of authority through her profession; this is evidenced by Lucio's approach to her at the convent gate. His response to Isabella denotes her dedication to the life she has chosen, and although Isabella has just entered the convent, she has already taken on the appearance and behaviors of a sister who has taken vows:

I hold you as a thing enskied, and sainted,
By your renouncement an immortal spirit,
And to be talk'd with in sincerity,
As with a saint.⁴⁹

In the first line above, Lucio alludes to Isabella as something placed in heaven and sainted. Lucio calls her "a thing" rather than "someone" or a "woman." The *Oxford English Dictionary* has multiple entries for the word "thing," but Shakespeare appears to be using it to mean "that which is or may be in any way an object of perception, knowledge, or thought; an entity, a being (Including persons, in contexts where personality is not significant.)."⁵⁰ His use of the word "thing" highlights the changes in common perceptions regarding life-long virginity, which in 1604 (the year of the play's

⁴⁸ Jessica Slights and Michael Morgan Holmes, "Isabella's Order: Religious Acts and Personal Desires in *Measure for Measure*," *Studies in Philology* 95, no. 3 (1998): 270.

⁴⁹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.34-37.

⁵⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n.1, "thing," <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 19, 2010). Shakespeare's use of this definition for "thing" is consistent with the context example used in the OED from *Henry IV, Pt. 2* V. v. 56: "Presume not that I am the thing I was."

first performance) was commonly considered an unnatural state for women, based on Protestant teachings. The “renouncement” he refers to focuses on Isabella’s renouncement of sex and a worldly life, which is, in turn, a renouncement of her use potential. This sacrifice, according to Lucio, equates her with an “immortal spirit” or “saint.” Like the use of “thing” earlier in his greeting, Lucio’s references to Isabella as an “immortal spirit” or “saint” label her once again as an unearthly creature. This is the way Isabella appears to others in the play—a woman who has absolved herself of worldly pleasures in such a way that makes her akin to a saint. By taking on the role of a saint, Isabella becomes at odds with lay people who lead ordinary lives and struggle with morality, like her brother Claudio, and holds a certain amount of power through her celibacy. Claudio requests the assistance of his sister because he recognizes the non-verbal power of youth and beauty contained within Isabella’s virginal body, “a prone⁵¹ and speechless dialect,” as well as her verbal power, which is a “prosperous art / When she will play with reason and discourse.”⁵² Claudio alludes to the power of Isabella’s body, which functions as a result of the untapped sexual (fertility) and social (marriage) potential. This potential lies only within virgins and evokes a power equal to, or even greater than, her words.

It can not go without mention that Shakespeare chose to name the novice within his play Isabella, a name that is associated with virginity and cloistered power. That he would choose such a name by coincidence is hard to believe, especially since Isabella

⁵¹ Prone seems to mean “Ready in mind” in this context. Shakespeare is noted to have used the word in that way in *Cymbeline*. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., adj., “prone,” <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁵² William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.2.183, 184-185.

seems to embody characteristics associated with the historic Isabella who created the Isabella Rule, a modified Franciscan Rule, and offshoot of the Poor Clares. There is no direct evidence that Shakespeare was knowledgeable about the Isabella rule, yet some scholars conclude that there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that Isabella's name is no coincidence.

G. K. Hunter was the first to recognize the connection between the character's name and the Isabella Rule. Hunter explains:

The Clares (or Clarisses) were named after their founder, but the Rule received in England did not go back to St. Clare, herself, but to the famous convent at Longchamp, founded in 1254 or '55 by the Blessed Isabella, sister to St. Louis of France.⁵³

Isabella, the sister of Louis IX of France, revised the Franciscan Rule to give women religious more equity with their male counterparts, as her belief was that nuns and friars were equals. To that end, as A. F. C. Bourdillon notes, the order was granted the right to call themselves "Sorores Minores" as a special favor to Louis IX; this is significant because "...the Longchamp monastery and its daughter houses were to be allowed a closer connection with the 'Fraters Minores' than the rest of the Order."⁵⁴ Darryl Gless later discovered that Shakespeare had ample opportunity to access the convent's copy of the Rule as a reference:

...the details of the Isabella Rule [found in *The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses Enclosid*] might easily have been known to members of Shakespeare's theatrical

⁵³ G. K. Hunter, "Six Notes on *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1964): 168.

⁵⁴ A. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Order of Minoresses in England* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1926), 8.

world. The manuscript of the rule that had belonged to the London Minoresses passed sometime after the dissolution into the library of Charles Howard, earl of Nottingham and long-time patron of the Admiral's Company.⁵⁵

Through the studies of Hunter and Gless, it appears that Shakespeare might have had access to reference materials on the Clares and the Isabella Rule, given that the Clares in England followed the Isabella Rule, and the details of the order are known to have been circulated among theatre circles, of which Shakespeare was a part. Natasha Korda provides yet another, more recent, connection between the playwright, Minoresses, and the name Isabella. Korda reveals:

It is perhaps more than coincidence that several of the order's noble patrons, founders, and abbesses were, like Shakespeare's young Clarissan novice, named Isabella. Among these was Queen Isabella, wife of Edward II (whom Shakespeare would have known via Marlowe and Holinshed).⁵⁶

Additionally, Korda mentions that according to a "Lanercost chronicler," Queen Isabella patronized the Minoresses and eventually joined the order in her last days.⁵⁷ Korda's observation provides yet another connection between Shakespeare and the order. All these facts add up to make a compelling argument regarding Isabella's name and Shakespeare's use of it. Indeed, the Isabella Rule's effort to equalize power structures within monastic life is reflected in the way Shakespeare constructs Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, for Isabella acknowledges that the female body is seen in the world as a something of value,

⁵⁵ Darryl Gless, *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*, 262.

⁵⁶ Natasha Korda, "Singlewomen and Poverty in *Measure for Measure*," 166.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

and seeks to retain her power through the cloistered life, which she recognizes is one avenue toward that end.

Even though the connection between and economics the female body is not as explicit in *Measure for Measure*—no one calls Isabella a “diamond”—Isabella’s body is utilized and viewed as a commodity by her brother, the Duke and Angelo. When Isabella is first approached about assisting Claudio, she reacts by noting her helplessness in the situation. Lucio quickly reminds her of the power of her body:

Aasay the pow’r you have.
 ...Go to Lord Angelo,
 And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,
 Men give like gods...⁵⁸

Lucio knows the power Isabella has is not predicated on her words, but the potentiality of her virginal body. He uses the word “maiden” specifically in this passage to indicate that only pure, virginal women can move men “like gods,” whereas women who have lost their virginity do not hold the same power. Isabella’s virginal state empowers her as a novice and representative of the church, but it is also her virginity that makes her an object of sexual desire. Isabella is introduced in Angelo’s chambers in a manner that underscores her celibacy when she is announced as “a very virtuous maid, / And to be shortly if a sisterhood, / If not already.”⁵⁹ Angelo dismisses Juliet, a sexually active woman, with disdain at one moment, while admitting Isabella based on her abstinence with the same breath: “Well; Let her [Isabella] be admitted. / See you the fornicatress

⁵⁸ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.76, 79-81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.4.20-23.

[Juliet] be removed.”⁶⁰ Interestingly, in this scene both women display their physical states outwardly—Juliet through her visible pregnancy and Isabella by her religious habit. Angelo’s response to Juliet and Isabella demonstrates that women in Vienna are differentiated more by their sexuality, or lack thereof, than any other defining characteristic.⁶¹ Isabella’s outward badge of her virginity, her habit, highlights the power within her sexual potential. Therefore, her words are worth more, and she holds more sway with Angelo. Juliet’s potential for sex and fertility has already been realized, as her pregnancy overtly conveys.⁶² Isabella’s celibacy and its outward show of potentiality, as Claudio aptly notices, is her most precious bargaining chip, yet at the same time this combination of purity and potential sexuality is exactly what makes the virgin a dangerous and threatening figure.

Though the correlation of a virginal body with wealth and/or gems is not as overt in *Measure for Measure*, Isabella’s body is eventually discussed in purely economic terms. The conflation appears within the play during act 2, scene 4. Angelo attempts multiple times to hint at the price for Claudio’s freedom—Isabella’s virginity—but it is only when he places the exchange in economic terms that Isabella understands his meaning: “You must lay down the treasures of your body / To this supposed, or else to let him [Claudio] suffer.”⁶³ Isabella is, literally, a “treasure” in the sense that her body is

⁶⁰ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.22-23.

⁶¹ For a detailed analysis of the economic implications of Juliet’s pregnancy in *Measure for Measure*, see Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Economies*, especially page 181.

⁶² Although Juliet’s sexuality is realized, her potential for marriage is not at this point. For more information on the broken nuptials in *Measure for Measure*, refer to Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Economies*, 162-163.

⁶³ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.96-97.

untainted and untapped; that purity and sense of sexual possibility is the very thing that makes her attractive to Angelo.

Isabella's immediate recognition of Angelo's request when it is placed in terms of commodity and exchange demonstrates an awareness of the worth of her virgin body. Rather than submitting and relinquishing her "treasures," Isabella takes control of the gem metaphor, turning Angelo's words back on themselves:

That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick from ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.⁶⁴

Frequently these lines are read as a reference to some underlying sexual deviance on Isabella's part.⁶⁵ Frances Dolan notes that "Protestants associated Catholicism with the stranger...by associating it, in subtle and inconsistent ways, with monstrosity, contamination, and blackness."⁶⁶ I suggest that reading Isabella's behavior in this scene as deviant or unnatural, even today, aligns her Catholicism with monstrosity and contamination. These lines are not primarily depraved or sexual, but express her

⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.100-104.

⁶⁵ Many critics see these lines as an allusion to deviant sexuality through Catholic flagellation or martyrdom. See Katharine Eisaman Maus, Introduction to *Measure for Measure*, by William Shakespeare in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, et al., Vol. 2, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2008), 310; Richard P. Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter-Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 112; Anna Kamaralli, "Writing about Motive: Isabella, the Duke and Moral Authority," *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 58 (2005): 51; Eileen Z. Cohen, "'Virtue Is Bold': The Bed-Trick and Characterization in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*," *Philological Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (1986): 183; Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 38; Carolyn E. Brown, "Measure for Measure: Isabella's Beating Fantasies," *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* 43, no. 1 (1986): 67-80.

⁶⁶ Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture*, 39.

privileging of spirituality and commitment to God over physical lust. Isabella's words indicate a "resistance [that] derives not simply from her refusal to acquiesce to [Angelo's] wishes, but from the knowledge that she is responsible for the preservation of her virginity."⁶⁷ Isabella's response is an act of defensive virginity, for she attempts to thwart Angelo's proposed violation of her virginity using language. Moreover, Isabella's use of gems in her speech declaring her resistance gestures towards an acknowledgement on her part of her body's worth.

The "rubies" become a symbol of self-inflicted torture in the verbal image created by Isabella. Shakespeare's choice of gemstone here is especially symbolic. Abby Jane Dubman Hansen points out that Shakespeare is "known to have seen and used one of the most complete repositories of information on the magical properties and precious stones available during his age: *Batman upon Batholome, his Booke de Proprietibus Rerum*..."⁶⁸ Since it is documented that Shakespeare had some knowledge of gemstones, his decision to use a ruby in this scene bears further examination. The Sloane Lapidary, dated in the late sixteenth century, describes the qualities attributed to rubies in the period:

It [rubies] overcometh all ye meruealious stoness of beauty. Yet some is clearer yen others, for ye cleare Rubie is of so gentle colour lyke a burning cole. He is lord and king of stoness and of gemss. It hath ye verture of xii stoness...So ye sick beaste yt drinck water that this stone is wett in ar holpen of ther sicknes. It driueth away all taches & ill conditions. It is sayd yt this stone is in ye flame of paradise.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, 173.

⁶⁸ Abby Jane Dubman Hanson, "Shakespeare and the Lore of Precious Stones," *College Literature* 4, no. 3 (1977): 210.

⁶⁹ "Sloane 2628," in *English Medieval Lapidaries*, ed. Joan Evans and Mary D. Serjeantson (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 123-124. I chose to use the Sloane Manuscript because it provides a fuller discussion of rubies than the Bateman manuscript, and it is among the easiest lapidary manuscript to read. The London Lapidary, North Midland Lapidary, and Peterborough Lapidary all contain similar information regarding the ruby, save its religious connotations, which are only present in the former two.

Isabella states that she would prefer to wear the whip marks of torture as though they are rubies. In this way, the suffering she endures in her resistance becomes a “marvelous stone of beauty.” The association between virtue and rubies is more applicable in this context, for Isabella is more virtuous than those who surround her and functions as a symbol of virtue through the play.

Additionally, rubies are associated with paradise, meaning heaven, and in earlier lapidaries there is a clear connection between rubies and religion. Both the London Lapidary (from the first half of the fifteenth century) and the North Midland Lapidary (fifteenth century) mention biblical references to the ruby: “Moyses seith Þat hit [rubies] signifieth Jhesu Xrist Þat come in-to this worlde for to lighten oure darknes.”⁷⁰ Rubies are correlated to redemptive light of Christ as well:

Al thei Þat Þe rubie & the veray brightness of Þe rubie beholden shulde beholde Þe veray lighte of Jhesu Xrist, whoso beholdeth Þe rubie of Þe lymmes of Jhesu Xrist he shal love Þt more thoo Þat be Þe clene living peple of this worlde.⁷¹

Isabella’s religious convictions are highlighted in *Measure for Measure*, and the religious connotations associated with the ruby emphasize not only Isabella’s religious convictions, but the paradox within the dialogue in which the words appear. The wounds/rubies Isabella is willing to display will only bring her closer to God; in the course of her suffering she will “beholdeth Þe rubie of Þe lymmes of Jhesu,” and that

⁷⁰ “London Lapidary” (Douce 291), in *English Medieval Lapidaries*, ed. Joan Evans and Mary D. Serjeantson (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

experience will further elevate her over the “clene living peple of this worlde.” She would prefer to die wearing flagellation scars as badges of her dedication to God, whom she is to be married once she takes her vows, leaving her death bed unadorned by any physical jewels, but empowered with spiritual ones. As a representative of the state, at least for a post-Reformation audience, Angelo should be more moral than the Catholic nun before him, and yet, that is not how Shakespeare portrays it.

Isabella goes on to vow that in addition to flagellation, stripping herself to death would be more enjoyable than having sexual relations with Angelo. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, usage of the word “strip” was not confined to undressing. The other meaning of “strip” in use at the time is to “move or pass swiftly.”⁷² There is a double-entendre on the word “strip” in this context. Isabella uses the word “strip” to refer to the stripping of her skin through the whipping (flagellation) she prefers to endure, but the alternative definition of “strip”—to move or pass swiftly—is also applied within these line. The latter use is appropriate in the context Isabella uses the word—she wishes a swift death upon taking her vows rather than sex. The longing she has been sick for is often misread as “longing” for sex with a mortal man. I offer that Isabella instead refers to her upcoming nuptials with Christ, for once she goes through the bridal ceremony, she will become completely off limits to men. Isabella takes control of this interaction and retains control of her body by replacing the patriarchal metaphor linking jewels, the female body, and sex with an image of a chaste body in service of Christ, effectively turning Angelo’s words to work against him.

⁷² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., intr., “strip,” <http://www.oed.com> (accessed January 5, 2010).

The Jew of Malta and *Measure for Measure* depict women's bodies, specifically virginal bodies, as commodities (like diamonds and rubies) that are exchanged between men and by men. The worth of the virginal body comes from its untapped potential. The convents within these plays offer both maidens alternatives to marriage, a way to maintain their worth by storing their sexual potential within the gates of the nunnery. It is only behind the convent walls that Abigail and Isabella are not thought of as gemstones or traded as commodities. Therefore, virginity becomes a site of powerful contention that leads male familial authorities—such as Barabas and Claudio—to sacrifice a valuable family asset, a daughter (Abigail) and a sister (Isabella), rather than see that potentiality/value wasted within the monastery.

This theme is more overt in *The Jew of Malta*, and Abigail's role as the proverbial sacrificial lamb has been noticed by many critics.⁷³ Abigail is aligned with another sacrificial virgin, Iphigenia, by her father in the opening scene of the play: "I have no charge, nor many children, / But one sole daughter, whom I hold dear / As Agamemnon did his Iphigen."⁷⁴ As Dena Goldberg points out, according to legend Iphigenia was sacrificed by Agamemnon early in the Trojan War to help his fleet.⁷⁵ Barabas hints through his metaphor that although he holds Abigail dear, he might be willing to part with her. Additionally, the placement of this statement in the initial scenes of the play signals the audience to bear in mind Agamemnon and his sacrifice during the

⁷³ See Dena Goldberg, "Sacrifice in the Jew of Malta," *Studies in English Literature* 32 (1992): 233-45; Michelle Ephraim, *Reading the Jewish Woman on Stage* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008) and Maurice Charney, "Shakespeare and Marlowe as Rivals and Imitators," *Renaissance Drama* 10 (1979): 33-44 for further reading on Abigail's relationship to Iphigenia.

⁷⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.1.135-137.

⁷⁵ Goldberg argues that the allusion to Iphigenia is a false lead and that Abigail's death is a "minor event," but it is through Abigail's death that justice is served. Dena Goldberg, "Sacrifice in the Jew of Malta," 233.

performance. It is significant that Barabas speaks these lines just before hearing the council has ruled Jews in Malta must either relinquish money to the state or convert to Christianity, as this is the issue that ultimately leads to Abigail's sacrifice. Barabas is left with a choice between wealth and conversion, and while this choice may seem immense on an individual or even familial level, the threat to Agamemnon's country if his fleet were to be defeated is not on the same scale as Barabas's problems, as Malta will not fall if Abigail lives.

Marlowe brings out another reference to sacrifice later in the play when Abigail is associated with another famous sacrificial virgin, the daughter of Jephthah.⁷⁶ When Lodowick presses Barabas about marrying Abigail, Barabas responds by saying, "but ere he shall have her, / I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood."⁷⁷ As Ruth Hanusa astutely observes, in Judges 11 Jephthah makes a vow to God on his way into battle: if God will give him victory, the first thing that comes from his house to greet him "shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it for a burnt offering."⁷⁸ The offering ends up being Jephthah's only daughter, and although it pains him to kill her, he fulfills his promise to God after allowing her two months in the mountains to mourn for the loss of her virginity, which she is not ready to surrender. Barabas's reference to sacrifice in this section is in response to Abigail's love for the Christian Mathias; his concern here is about the tainting of his daughter by someone he considers an infidel, an offense he deems as reason

⁷⁶ Ruth L. Hanusa, "Killing the Daughter: Judges' Jephthah and *The Jew of Malta's* Barabas," *Notes and Queries* 46, no. 244 (1999): 199.

⁷⁷ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.2.52-3.

⁷⁸ Ruth L. Hanusa, "Killing the Daughter: Judges' Jephthah and *The Jew of Malta's* Barabas," 199.

enough to sacrifice her.⁷⁹ Once again, Barabas's sacrifice of his daughter is only relevant to his personal war, but does not have any larger implications for Malta (beyond one less Jew in their population).

The audience is continually reminded that both Agamemnon and Jephthah's sacrifices of their daughters are troubling, yet (perhaps) understandable given the context of the sacrifices—to defeat an opponent in battle and maintain the power of each respective state. It is especially clear in Agamemnon's case that without Iphigenia's sacrifice the Greek army could never attain victory, a weight much heavier than Barabas's.⁸⁰ However, Barabas's reason for eventually sacrificing his daughter offers no such rationale. His allusions to Iphigenia and Jephthah are a response to problems within his household—the ultimatum given to him by the Maltese government (money or conversion) and the prospect of his daughter marrying an infidel, whom she dearly loves and is willing to marry in spite of their different religions. But the irony is that by the time Abigail has entered the convent, Mathias and Lodowick are dead; she has no marriage prospects, and there is no concern that she might marry an infidel. The root of Barabas's need to sacrifice Abigail comes from his need to control her body, which he views as a commodity he owns. Her death is not a “pious gesture” on his part or “an affirmation of his daughter's Christian martyrdom.”⁸¹ Since Abigail is considered part of her father's wealth, Barabas feels justified and empowered to maintain control of

⁷⁹ For more on the differences between conversion narratives (both fictional and non-fictional) on male and female Jews see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), especially pages 131-165.

⁸⁰ Dena Goldberg, “Sacrifice in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*,” 233.

⁸¹ Michelle Ephraim, *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage—Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, 114.

Abigail's body even after she has entered the convent; if he cannot control her, then no one can.

In case the audience fails to connect Barabas's act of poisoning as a depraved form of sacrifice through Marlowe's references to Agamemnon and Judges, the point is driven home succinctly through reaction of friar Jacomo, who asks: "What, has he crucified a child?"⁸² Even though Barabas does not literally crucify his daughter, he does sacrifice her. Abigail's death is not symbolic for any greater good, nor does it promote the welfare of Malta. Rather, Abigail's untimely death signifies Barabas's self-interest, avarice, and need to control his daughter's body at all costs. Abigail's deathbed confession places her in the martyr position while her father becomes a man silenced by his dying daughter—a virtual role-reversal.

In a similar way, Isabella acts as the sacrificial lamb for her brother in *Measure for Measure*. Claudio is willing to destroy her valuable virginity in exchange for his freedom. He expects Isabella to comply with Angelo's request and sacrifice herself, her body, and her soul for his freedom. This is a sacrifice Isabella is unwilling to make. After Angelo reveals the price of Claudio's freedom to Isabella, her reaction is not only disgust but also a misguided confidence that her brother will support her refusal of Angelo's vile offer. As Isabella leaves the ill-fated meeting, she ponders aloud:

Then Isabel, live chaste and, brother, die;
More than our brother is our chastity

⁸² Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 4.1.49. Jews were often accused of killing their children, and this was part of negative stereotypes about them. See Anna Beskin, "From Jew to Nun: Abigail in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*," *Explicator* 65, no. 3 (2007): 135 and James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 102-105.

I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,
And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.⁸³

There is no doubt within Isabella's mind that her virginity is worth more than her brother's life, and her words indicate that she foresees no problem once she informs him of the request and her choice.⁸⁴ Once Isabella's virginity is gone, she will no longer have a place within the confines of the convent. For her it is too high a price to pay for the crimes of another, even if that person happens to be her brother.

However, once Isabella explains the situation to Claudio, he cannot grasp why she refuses to complete a task that is, at least in his mind, a short, simple act that will free him from prison. Claudio, as a man, has money and wealth, including his sister, with which he can barter, but for Isabella, the loss of her virginity signals the loss of the one thing that allows her to remain within the confines of the convent, her maidenhood. Claudio's reaction is at first understanding, but when he realizes her rejection of Angelo's offer seals his death sentence, he attempts to reason with Isabella. He points out, "What sin you do to save a brother's life, / nature dispenses with the deed so far, / That it becomes a virtue."⁸⁵ In essence, he explains to Isabella that in saving his life, she enacts a work of kindness and forgiveness, which would only increase her virtue. But Claudio's logic is misplaced on Isabella, who sees the value in spiritual and bodily purity as more important than redeeming her brother's sins of the flesh.

⁸³ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.184-187.

⁸⁴ Barbara Baines argues that in this passage Isabella's linguistic construction does not allow for a distinction between her body and soul, but this argument is based on a purely religious reasoning for Isabella's virginity. See Barbara Baines, "Assaying the Power of Chastity in *Measure for Measure*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30, no. 2 (1990): 289.

⁸⁵ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.32-34.

The alternative plan given to Isabella by the Duke, disguised as a friar, is one that allows her to preserve her virginity by using a bed-trick. The bed-trick is successful because of Isabella and her steadfast assertions that she will not part from her virginity. Angelo, as pointed out by Eileen Cohen, does not expect any such action from her, allowing the ladies to successfully complete their plan.⁸⁶ Isabella's willingness to go along with the bed-trick brings up an interesting point. Isabella will not part with her virginity, yet she finds no problem at all with the marriages of others. In fact, she endorses the unions of Claudio and Juliet as well as Mariana and Angelo several times in the play. The first endorsement occurs early, when Isabella is informed of her brother's imprisonment and impending death. Her reaction to this news is, "O, let him marry her."⁸⁷ Later, as Vincentio explains Mariana's relationship with Angelo, Isabella's reaction is not that of one averse to marriage. She is more interested in helping Mariana "avail," and the only way Mariana can avail is through marriage. Isabella's quick agreement to the bed-trick plan reflects her knowledge "that the ethical conduct of most men and women is regulated not by God and his church but by the standards of society and individual conscience," a realization that she accepts for others but rejects for herself.⁸⁸ It is evident that Isabella has no problem with other people marrying. She, on the other hand, chooses not to marry, and uses her position within the convent maintain control of her own body, an act of defensive virginity.

⁸⁶ Eileen Z. Cohen, "'Virtue Is Bold': The Bed-Trick and Characterization in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*," 183.

⁸⁷ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.48.

⁸⁸ William John Roscelli, "Isabella, Sin, and Civil Law," *University of Kansas City Review* 28 (1962): 217. Roscelli states that Isabella's participation in the bed trick is predicated on her belief that religion can not be imposed on others, but her decision is a secular one based on personal autonomy in my opinion.

In *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* Abigail and Isabella resist male control, for different reasons, and take a stand against allowing male authority figures, namely Barabas and Claudio, to dictate the ways in which their bodies are used. These dramas present an alternative way, albeit on stage, to elude male ascendancy and explore how convents might provide isolation and protection from the world as a defensive move—a safe haven where female bodies are not thought of as “diamonds” and “rubies” or sacrificed. On the other hand, the power Abigail and Isabella derive from their virginity is out of place in a post-Reformation society, for their virginity is only truly secure when they are within the confines of the nunnery. In this way, the enclosed space of the convent acts as a site of resistance and highlights the displacement of virgins in a culture that privileges marriage over virginity.

Abigail’s experiences demonstrate that the safest place for a woman is behind the walls of an enclosed space, for beyond the walls of Abigail’s home, lies are told, she is silenced, and her virginal body is used as a vessel of revenge without her consent. Abigail begins the play living in her familial home, but flees to the convent (an act of defensive virginity) for protection from the threats to her virginity. The isolation and confinement of monastic life is pointed out within the first act of the play as Abigail informs her father, Barabas, about the transformation of their home into a convent:

For there I left the Governor placing nuns,
Displacing me; and of thy house they mean
To make a nunnery, where none but their own sect
Must enter in—men generally barred.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.254-257.

Abigail, now removed from her house, feels a sense of dislocation. She emerges from the safe warmth of her home into a city where corruption, greed, and sex are the status quo. The convent, she points out, offers solace from the city since only certain people are admitted there and men, in particular, are barred from entering. While at first this seems foreign to the young Abigail, by the end of the play she will be looking for an escape, a way to isolate herself from men and society in general. As Barabas's desire for revenge grows, the threat to Abigail's virginity grows, as she becomes an unwilling participant in Barabas's revenge plots.

When Barabas learns the Maltese council has taken his home and converted it into a convent, he rails against them. He complains that the council acted "Against my will, and whether I would or no, / Seized all I had and thrust me out o' doors, / and made my house a place for nuns chaste."⁹⁰ Ironically, this is exactly what he does to Abigail. For revenge and greed, Barabas thrusts his daughter out of the house, first to recoup his valuables from the convent, then to use her body and a promise of marriage as a means to murder both the Governor's son and the Christian Abigail dearly loves. Abigail has no say in what she does as long as she lives under her father's rule, so she is forced to participate in Barabas's plan for retaliation against her will. Furthermore, Barabas vanquishes all her hopes for a happy future when he facilitates the murder of her love, Mathias. The family home, where chaste nuns now reside, eventually becomes her new home, a place where she can maintain her virginity as a nun, removed from the corruption of the city.

⁹⁰ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.76-78.

The isolation of the convent and the women who reside there is one of the things that draws Abigail to her conversion, and this is a lesson she learns even before her initial contact with the Abbess. Abigail first encounters the nuns as they make the journey to their new nunnery. The Abbess comments: “We [nuns] love not to be seen.”⁹¹ Abigail and her father are on stage at this point, listening to the conversation of the friars and nuns as they make their way across the stage to their new home. Like Abigail and the jewels she rescues from the floorboards of her old home, the sisters keep themselves hidden from the corruption of the city. Although Abigail’s desire to “as a novice learn to frame / My solitary life to your straight laws” is at first a con, the lessons Abigail learns about the safety enclosure provides her in terms of maintaining her virginal body, and the authority she retains along with it, begin with her initial exposure to the Abbess.⁹²

Abigail’s father reinforces the teaching she receives from the Abbess; the confines of home are the safest place for her to be in terms of protecting her virginity. After Abigail leaves the convent following her first admission, Barabas continuously attempts to confine Abigail at his will, and it is a confinement she has little control over. He wants her to be at home unless she is taking part in one of his schemes. When she participates in his schemes, her body is used as a commodity to be bought, sold, or bartered. Upon Abigail’s return home from her initial confinement, Barabas brags, “They thought my daughter would ha’ been a nun; / but she’s at home.”⁹³ Barabas’s home, like the convent, acts as a point of enclosure and isolation. However, as the male

⁹¹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.306.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.2.330-331.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.3.13-14.

authority over his daughter, Barabas directs her movement and dictates when she leaves the house and when she stays in it.

Barabas's desire to "disguise Abigail and his later fantasy of her locked away in his house suggests how he protects Abigail sexually...from Christian infiltration."⁹⁴ Yet in his desire to protect Abigail from Christian infiltration, he is willing to use her body as a catalyst for the fatal disagreement between Lodowick and Mathias. Abigail learns that outside the convent she has no authority or control over her body. It is not within her power to say "no" to her father, no matter how much she wishes. As Michelle Ephraim points out, Abigail is constantly displaced and "taking on multiple roles that suit the desires of her particular audience" for the greater portion of the play, instead of taking on a role that suits her desires.⁹⁵ Barabas pushes Abigail out of her home unwillingly, and unknowingly pushes her to the alternative, the veil. Her father's home, which once provided her security and protection, becomes a throughway house—a home she will be forced to leave in order to marry. The convent is the only alternative for Abigail if she desires to take control over her body and maidenhood. Once Abigail decides to enter the convent the second time, she sends Ithamore to the nunnery to get the friar rather than venturing out herself. In this way, Marlowe conveys to the audience that Abigail understands the potential dangers she faces outside an enclosed and unprotected environment and willingly confines herself to the nunnery, an act of defensive virginity.

⁹⁴ Michelle Ephraim, *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage—Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, 117.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

It should be noted that to stage the Catholic conversion of a Jew in early modern England was not unusual. James Shapiro documents that “England’s fascination with the conversion of Jews had begun in earnest in the late 1570s and early 1580s and was quite well established by the time Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*,” sometime between 1596 and 1598.⁹⁶ *The Jew of Malta*, first performed in 1592, uses Abigail’s conversion to underscore the evil and violent nature of Barabas. By choosing to abandon Judaism, Abigail knowingly breaks all ties with her father, a man who is willing to sacrifice his only daughter rather than convert to Christianity or pay his taxes. It was not an uncommon practice for women to seek refuge within the confines of the cloister, but living behind convent walls did not mean there was no danger to the nuns residing there. Historical pre-Reformation documents tell us monasteries and their residents were “often targets of violence, rape and plunder.”⁹⁷ Strict claustration emerged as a way to protect women living in the monasteries from such heinous acts. There is no doubt that Barabas’s deeds incite violence and civil disorder, and under these extreme circumstances (and likely only under these types of extreme circumstance), the convent is staged as an acceptable solution to a very difficult situation. Abigail’s claustration is a response to violence and disorder, but in her case the seat of the violence is within her home, the threat to her virginity both external (the city) and internal (her home), for which the only escape is confinement behind the safe walls of the convent, where she dies a virgin.

⁹⁶ James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 134.

⁹⁷ Jane Tibbitts Schulenburg, “The Heroics of Virginity,” 42. For specific cases in which nuns suffered violent attacks and rapes within their monasteries, see Schulenburg’s article, esp. 41-62.

Measure for Measure's Isabella follows a trajectory opposite that of Abigail.

Whereas Abigail enters the convent out of despair and a desire to remove herself from the manipulative scheming of her father, Isabella leaves the convent in order to save her brother. In the first act of the play, Isabella is shown at a convent. As the scene opens, Isabella confesses to Francisca, another nun, that she is not fully content with the order: "I speak not desiring more, / But rather wishing a more a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood, the votaries of St. Clare."⁹⁸ In this scene "the insularity and withdrawal of the Clares is emphasized"⁹⁹ to show that Isabella is not only joining a religious order due to her dedication to God; she is joining the order to afford herself protection from the sexually corrupt city of Vienna. Because men, with few exceptions, are not admitted to convents, monastic life offers one avenue through which a maiden's virginity can be protected and a place where Isabella can close herself off from the corruption of Vienna.¹⁰⁰

Vienna would have been virtually unknown to an audience watching *Measure for Measure* in 1604, but the dialogue within the play alludes to the corruption and illegal sexual practices occurring in the city.¹⁰¹ The lack of morality and adherence to law and order is established within the first act and scene when Duke Vincentio goes into hiding. The Duke's abandonment of his leadership role in Vienna to re-establish order in the city

⁹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4. 4-5.

⁹⁹ Stacy Magedanz, "Public Justice and Private Mercy in *Measure for Measure*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 2 (2004): 321.

¹⁰⁰ The Clares order was particularly strict about visitation, and few, if any, men (including monastic men) were ever admitted within the gates of a Clare order.

¹⁰¹ Gary Taylor, "Shakespeare's Mediterranean *Measure for Measure*," in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Valencia, 2001*, ed. Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vincente Fores (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 246.

is an indicator of the disorder and chaos within Shakespeare's Vienna. The convent is depicted as a place of respite from the turmoil of the city, and when set against the corrupt authority figures within *Measure for Measure*, Isabella's choice to join a convent appears to be a defensive, protective move. Given the other relationship alternatives presented in the play—illegal sexuality, unconsummated marriages, or marriages without love—the convent becomes a space that offers an alternative to entering the sexual/marriage marketplace as symbolized by the depravity of Vienna. Isabella seems determined to retain control of her body, and the convent of St. Clare, with its tightly gated borders, is the best place for her to protect it.

Shakespeare's use of the gate, like his use of the name Isabella, points to a familiarity with the order of St. Clare. For Poor Clares, as the order was lovingly nicknamed, the gate was an important barrier from the outside world. So important, in fact, that the order had a "porteresse" or gatekeeper. In the St. Clares' constitution, it states that there should be a "whee...by which Turne, the Sisters may receive, or send forth, all necessities for the Monastarie."¹⁰² Items, such as food, that cannot be received through the wheel must be brought to the back gate. The back gate is the only possible entrance into a Clare monastery, "for the greater securities and purite of the Religious and Convent."¹⁰³ The Constitution goes on to outline a detailed and precise procedure that must be followed when the convent receives supplies (or people), all of which must enter

¹⁰² For the ease of the reader, quotes from the English Minoress's Order are taken from a later transcription of the text. This transcription is from the original document, but the words are more modernized and spellings less variant. In the fifteenth century text, *The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses Enclosid*, the quoted information is found on pages 88-92. In the 1665 version of the text, the quoted information is located on pages 234-235.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 235.

through the gate. There is a speaking place for the gate watchers that is “wel fenced with iron pikes, where the Religious may speak.”¹⁰⁴ Apart from the principle gate, there is another gate, “soe that the Sisters be wholly debarred, from accesse unto the outward, or principal gate: in such sort that their persons of voices, may in noe ways be discerned by seculars without.”¹⁰⁵ The gate has not one, but two locks, and the gate must remain locked, by at least one of two locks, at all times. The Abbess holds one key while the Porteresse keeps the other. The Clares took their vows of enclosure very seriously.

The image of enclosure is represented twice in *Measure for Measure*, once at the convent gate and again through an enclosed garden space. In act 1, scene 4 Isabella and Francisca, a nun, hear Lucio yelling outside the gates of the convent. Francisca takes a moment to explain to Isabella some rules of the order:

It is a man's voice. Gentler Isabella,
 Turn you the key, and know this business of him;
 You may, I may not; you are yet unsworn.
 When you have vow'd, you must speak with men
 Only in the presence of the prioress;
 Then if you speak, you must not show your face,
 Or if you show your face, you must not speak.¹⁰⁶

Isabella must turn the key and open the gate since she has not yet taken her vows. Once the key is turned, she effectively opens the gate and engages in discussion with Lucio about the outside world. It is through this dialogue that she finds herself forced by a

¹⁰⁴ The Poore Clares, *The Rewle of the Sustris Menouresses Enclosid*, 235.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 236.

¹⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.8-14.

sense of sisterly duty to leave the safe haven of the convent and walk through Vienna to engage in a plea for her brother's life with the male Viennese authority—Angelo.

This scene plays out again later in the play, but the second time Angelo gives Isabella a key and bids her come to a gated garden after nightfall. Isabella tells the Duke (Vincentio) that she has “ta'en a due and weary note upon't...In action of all precept, he did show me / the way twice over.”¹⁰⁷ Angelo shows her the way into the garden and through the gate twice, his instructions paralleling the instructions of the nun Francisca from the first act. His need to give her directions twice can be correlated with early modern perceptions of Catholics, for “[o]ne pervasive assumption was that Catholics...could not be trusted to be loyal subjects.”¹⁰⁸ Since Isabella is Catholic and Angelo is a representative of the state, the instructions must be repeated in hopes that she will follow them correctly. The repetition also highlights Isabella's unease with the impending plan and her role as subject, especially when set against the readiness with which she accepted and internalized the directions given to her by Francisca, a representative of the Catholic Church. Moreover, Isabella's inability to internalize and focus on the directions given to her by Angelo demonstrates her allegiance to the rules of her order over the rules of the state, which reinforces the stereotype of Catholic as unreliable subject. In this instance, however, the rule of the state is a morally ambiguous one, that if followed breaks social and moral codes for Catholics and Protestants alike.

The rules of the Catholic Church come to represent protection from the threats virgins

¹⁰⁷ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 4.1.37, 39.

¹⁰⁸ Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 34. Dolan is, of course, discussing English concepts of Catholicism in this passage. Although *Measure for Measure* is set in Vienna, early modern plays were known to use locations beyond the borders of England as settings while at the same time critiquing English political and social issues.

face in the outside world. In contrast, Angelo's directions, the directions of the state, lead Isabella into a situation where someone will be violated rather than protected.

Subsequently, the state cannot offer Isabella protection like the well-secured gates of the convent.

Isabella ultimately does not follow the directions given to her by Angelo word for word. Instead, she alters them by combining directions of both Angelo and Francisca together before giving them to Mariana—unlock the gate (as directed by Francisca and Angelo) , meet Angelo (as instructed by Angelo), but “little have you to say / when you part with him, but soft and low, / ‘Remember now my brother’ ” (as directed by Francisca).¹⁰⁹ At the convent, unlocking the gate means allowing an outsider into the cloistered walls of the order, but upon entering the convent walls, the outsider must follow the rules of the order regarding contact with the minoresses and speaking with them. Mariana is to enter Angelo's garden gate. Since Angelo is a representative of the state, when Mariana enters his gate, she treads onto grounds of the state, where she is subject (and victim) to its laws and demands. The gate becomes a boundary for both women in different ways. For Isabella, the gate acts as a threshold between the protective walls of the convent and the violent external world, while for Mariana the gate is a transitional entryway that leads to her legal role as Angelo's wife.

Mariana and Isabella come to the city from places of isolation. As Maureen Connolly McFeely argues, the convent of St. Clare parallels Mariana's domicile in that

¹⁰⁹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 4.1.66-68

they are both outliers from the rule of the city and they both offer sanctuary.¹¹⁰ St. Clares is “made holy by the church,” while Mariana’s moated grange at St. Luke’s “links it with the definition of *grange* as ‘an outlying farm-house belonging to a religious establishment.’”¹¹¹ The difficulties both women face exist only when they leave their protected sanctuaries and enter into the male dominated, corrupt city of Vienna. The major difference between Mariana and Isabella is their opinions of confinement. Mariana is unhappy and wants to leave her outlying farm house to join Angelo in the city as his wife. Isabella, on the other hand, is happy with her enclosure and has no desire to leave the confines of her order. When Mariana leaves her isolated home and enters the garden, she loses her virginity and in turn seals her marriage contract with Angelo. Isabella leaves the garden with her virginity intact, averting the one potential pitfall that might bar her re-entrance into the order of St. Clares, a sexual encounter. For Isabella, the gates of the convent give her what she wants—freedom from male rule through isolation—and it is to those gates that she wishes to return.

Isolation and enclosure were certainly part of early modern monastic life, but another important facet of monastic life was silence. Even within the secular public women with loose tongues were linked to looseness in other areas. A woman’s modesty was a measure of her virtue, and “silence was an essential component of modesty.”¹¹² A woman who spoke too much was thought immodest and immoral. Silence and speech are

¹¹⁰ Maureen Connolly McFeely, “‘This day my sister should the cloister enter’: The Convent as Refuge in *Measure for Measure*, in *Subjects on the World’s Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 201.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹² Patricia Crawford, “Women’s Published Writings 1600-1700,” in *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Routledge, 1985), 216.

important aspects of Abigail and Isabella's defensive virginity because of the relationship silence bears to virtue. Each woman learns when to speak and when to be silent, when she will be heard and when she will be ignored. These moments of speech and silence act as markers for moments of authority and moments of powerlessness. When Abigail and Isabella speak in the city, their words have little meaning at all, and often the words they are forced to utter are not their own, placed within their mouths by men in authority positions. For Abigail, that man is her father; for Isabella, the Duke, a representative of the state. In due course, Abigail and Isabella determine they have more power behind the quiet walls of the convent than in the city streets.

The importance of silence as a marker of maidenhood, virtue, and obedience in *The Jew of Malta* is demonstrated through Barabas's control of when and how his daughter speaks. This is evident early in the play as exemplified by Abigail's reaction to the Maltese government's demands of Barabas. When she hears their demands, she responds in an emotional verbal outburst:

ABIGAIL. With fierce exclams run to the senate house,
And in the senate reprehend them all,
And rend their hearts with tearing of my hair,
Till they reduce the wrongs done to my father.

BARABAS. No, Abigail, things past recovery
Are hardly cured with exclamations.
Be silent daughter; sufferance breeds ease
And time may yield us an occasion
Which on the sudden cannot serve the turn.¹¹³

¹¹³ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.234-242.

Abigail's lack of control prompts Barabas to silence his daughter, effectively shutting down her emotions and desire to take action on his behalf. Just as Barabas controls Abigail's body by using it as an object of exchange, he controls her mouth and language as well, silencing her pragmatic words. Abigail's need to help her father is apparent in these lines, yet Barabas's critique of her vengeful words is not that they lack mercy, but that they are not well thought-out. Barabas urges patience in his daughter via his response to her strong language; however, his version of patience involves righting things through schemes and manipulations rather than waiting for God to make things right. He encourages Abigail to "Be silent," just as good daughter should be. In the eyes of Barabas, Abigail must speak when it is appropriate (he will, of course, determine that time) and otherwise remain silent.

Abigail is only allowed a voice by her father when she is uttering his words. She is not allowed to construct words or voice opinions of her own throughout much of the play. Barabas teaches his daughter to talk her way into the convent and woo men with her words. Both of these schemes are forms of manipulation, and Abigail has reservations (if not downright protestations) about her ability to perform these manipulative acts convincingly. She courts the Abbess when petitioning for entrance into the convent by asking for pity: "Pity the state of a distressed maid!"¹¹⁴ She then follows her plea for pity with claims of conversion and remorse for her Judaic beliefs: "I'd pass away my life in penitence, / And be a novice in your nunnery, / to make atonement for

¹¹⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.314.

my laboring soul.”¹¹⁵ Abigail’s words are not her own; they are the words of her father. Less than one hundred lines before Abigail’s act begins, Barabas directs his daughter to hide under the guise of religion to gain entry into the convent since “religion / Hides many mischiefs from suspicion.”¹¹⁶ Abigail, being the dutiful daughter, obeys Barabas—even though she has doubts about her ability to convince the Abbess of her sincerity—and utters the words of her father through her voice. It is clear to the audience, even at this early juncture in the play, just how vulnerable Barabas’s schemes make his daughter to violation and corruption.

By the second act Abigail begins to pay more attention to the content and implications of the words her father asks her to speak. Outside the convent walls she verbally protests her father’s plan to use her body to drive a wedge between Lodowick and Mathias, but her objections to Barabas’s scheme go unheard and/or ignored. Lodowick arrives to discuss the terms of their marriage contract, and Barabas directs Abigail in how she must speak to him:

Entertain Lodowick, the Governor’s son,
With all the courtesy you can afford,
Provided that you keep your maidenhead.
Use him as if he were a—Philistine.¹¹⁷

Barabas goes on to instruct his daughter to kiss Lodowick and speak to him sweetly, “like a cunning Jew.”¹¹⁸ In this way, speech becomes a form of seduction, executed to coax

¹¹⁵ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.323-325.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1.2.282-283.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 2.3.229-232. Barabas’s coaching of Abigail is also discussed by Michelle Ephraim in *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage*, 119.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.2.239.

Lodowick into desiring Abigail, which is something she does not want. Abigail's rebellion is silenced by Barabas, and she exits with Lodowick, presumably to woo him, complying to her father's demands once again. We are not given Abigail's words within the play's lines, but the couple re-enters later in the scene hand in hand, indicating that Barabas's words have been given voice through the mouth of a reluctant Abigail. She has well played the part of ingénue and kept her maidenhead intact, in hopes of saving herself for her true love, Mathias.

Abigail attempts to regain some type of control over her voice and her body when she tries to make her voice heard among the male voices and turmoil upon returning the room, but this time she crafts her words in such a way that their meaning is not obvious to any of the other characters. Barabas tells Lodowick he has "entreated her [Abigail], and she will grant" his marriage proposal.¹¹⁹ Abigail's powerlessness is demonstrated by her response to Lodowick's proposal: "I cannot choose, seeing my father bids."¹²⁰ Her reply is a combination of an aside and double entendre that gives away her actual feelings. As noted by Ren Draya, "it is as if she says, I have no choice, no voice."¹²¹ This is a moment of self-awareness for Abigail, a turning point. To Lodowick she answers, "Nothing but death should part my love and me."¹²² Both Lodowick and Barabas are appeased by her answer, unaware that the "love" she refers to is Mathias, not Lodowick. From this moment forward, Abigail's speech acts become less conformative and more subversive as she attempts to regain control over her body and her future.

¹¹⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.318.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2.3.320.

¹²¹ Ren Draya, "Silenced Women: Abigail in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Publications of the Missouri Philological Association* 24 (1999): 16.

¹²² Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.321.

Barabas should provide protection for his daughter from the unwanted advances of a suitor, but he is the very person who incites and propagates Lodowick's ill-fated suit. The reality of situation begins to dawn on Abigail for the first time—her protector is not a protector at all. Rather, Barabas barter with his daughter's heart as though it actually is a diamond. Barabas, for fear of his diamond losing its shine and worth, grapples to control Abigail's words and body by ordering Ithamore to "Stay her! Let her speak not one more word."¹²³ The arrival of Mathias only complicates the confusion and emboldens Abigail's passionate speech. Abigail once again implores her father that she will be with Mathias not Lodowick; she cannot hold her tongue when her future is at stake, so she confronts him:

ABIGAIL. ...Father, why have you thus incensed them both [Lodowick and Mathias]?

BARABAS. What's that to thee?

ABIGAIL. I'll make 'em friends again.

BARABAS. You'll make 'em friends?
Are there not Jews enough in Malta
But thou must dote upon a Christian?

ABIGAIL. I will have Don Mathias; he is my love.

BARABAS. Yes, you shall have him [to Ithamore] Go put her in [the house].¹²⁴

Abigail realizes that her father will never let her choose her husband, even though she already loves Mathias and wants to marry him. With her future happiness in jeopardy,

¹²³ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 2.3.327-328.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.3.360-367.

Abigail speaks her mind to her father by plainly telling him she “will have Don Mathias.”

Barabas agrees with Abigail only to appease her, as his directions to Ithamore (“put her in” the house) indicate, for he has no intention of allowing her to marry Mathias.

Barabas’s reaction to Abigail’s protest is to relegate his daughter back into the house, a space where he has control of her words, body and where she is removed from the outside threats to contaminate her. Abigail’s voice is buried within her father’s words and behind the walls of her father’s house. She is again hidden within the home, like Barabas’s other precious commodities.

Abigail can only find the autonomy to control her words away from her father’s house, and she finds her independence during her second admission into the convent. Until Abigail’s final admission to the nunnery, she is forced to speak words that are not her own. She is shown the value of silence in terms of being an obedient daughter, and she is shown the way words act as catalysts for life and death. She learns that there is a time for silence and a time for speech. Once Abigail enters the convent, she is silent. She is no longer required to use words for ends that are not her own and take part in schemes that are not her own. As the friar Jacomo points out, upon her entry into the nunnery, she “hath mortified herself” in the sense that she is now one who is dead to the world—she is silent.¹²⁵ Abigail’s silence allows her to locate her voice and express herself on paper, frequently writing to her father to urge his conversion. The threat of Abigail’s knowledge and damning words, despite her vows, cannot be lost on Barabas who “understands that the Catholic Church is his rival and that his daughter has

¹²⁵ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.340.

irretrievably abandoned him.”¹²⁶ Abigail’s abandonment of Barabas in favor of the convent reflects her need to maintain control over her body, especially when her body is threatened by her own father.

These lessons, good and bad, come full circle after Abigail enters the convent. There her virginal body has worth in the way that it serves God, not man. Her voice is heard and valued in the convent—not as a diamond, gem, or lover, but as a servant and daughter of God. This is evidenced by the impact of Abigail’s deathbed confession. Barabas poisons the entire convent where his daughter resides in a final attempt to silence Abigail’s words and control her body. His plan does not go exactly as he thought, and the poison intended to silence Abigail allows her to live long enough to confess the role she and Barabas played in the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. It is Abigail’s words that finally doom Barabas, as she confesses on her deathbed:

ABIGAIL. Be you [friar Bernardine] my ghostly father; and first know
That in this house I lived religiously,
Chase, devout, much sorrowing for my sins.
But ere I came—

BERNARDINE. Yes. What of them?

ABIGAIL. My father did contract me to ’em both:
First to Don Lodowick; him I never loved.
Mathias was the man that I held dear,
And for his sake I become a nun.

BERNARDINE. So. Say, how was their end?

ABIGAIL. Both, jealous of my love, envied each other;
And by my father’s practice, which is there

¹²⁶ Maurice Charney, “Jessica’s Turquoise Ring and Abigail’s Poisoned Porridge: Shakespeare and Marlowe as Rivals and Imitators,” 37.

Set down larger [giving paper], the gallants were both slain.

BERNARDINE. Oh, monstrous villainy!

ABIGAIL. To work my peace, this I confess to thee.
 Reveal it not, for then my father dies...
 Death seizeth on my heart. Ah, gentle friar!

Convert my father that he may be saved,
 And witness that I die a Christian!¹²⁷

Before her confession can be validated, Abigail must qualify her merit as a Christian through her virginity and adherence to her order. As a converted Jew, her confession is suspect due to “the popular belief that, with death imminent, Jewish converts repudiated the Christianity they had once willingly embraced.”¹²⁸ Abigail’s words do convince Friar Bernadine of her sincerity; he listens to her confession, and responds to it. The convent represents a “true” home in the sense that it provides protection for Abigail, and Friar Bernadine, as a representative of God, replaces her biological father. Bernadine is a father who listens to her words, unlike Barabas, and believes her confession so fully that he confronts Barabas about his sins, setting off a chain of events resulting in Barabas’s destruction. Hence, Abigail refuses to be silenced, looking to a place where her voice can be heard and a place where her voice finds authority—the kind of authority that can only be found behind the convent wall, for the convent gives her voice not only a place to be heard, but also power over her father through a spiritual father.

¹²⁷ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 4.1.12-40

¹²⁸ James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 158.

While Abigail learns about words and silence from her father, Isabella appears well schooled on social structures regarding female speech from her first presentation in act 1. The plot of *Measure for Measure* turns effectively on Isabella's words—with a compliant “yes” from her Claudio is saved, but with a defiant “no,” his life is lost. While Isabella's words and body language at least provoke the possibility of clemency for Claudio, it is also her words that disrupt the presumed trajectory of the play. The problems with female speech and the question of when it is appropriate to speak or be silent culminate in the final scene of the play, as Isabella vacillates between keeping her vows of silence and speaking words she knows may damn her brother to death.

Isabella's adherence to the guidelines of her order is called into question twice during the final scene—when she falsely confesses to sleeping with Angelo, and when the Duke's proposals to her go unanswered. During her false confession she speaks powerful words, but Isabella's silent reply to Vincentio's proposal is powerful as well. When the source of Isabella's instruction is considered, her confession to a sin she did not commit is understandable. Up to the final moments in the play, Isabella believes that Vincentio is really a friar, a man who is more experienced and seasoned in the guidelines and rules of monastic life. Given this, it is reasonable that Isabella would have followed the advice of an elder of her faith, even when his suggestion of the bed-trick seems unconventional.¹²⁹ This is particularly true in terms of English early modern ideas about Catholics, who were thought to be divided in their allegiances to their pope and sovereign

¹²⁹ Maureen McFeely shares in this point of view. See Maureen Connolly McFeely, “‘This day my sister should the cloister enter’: The Convent as Refuge in *Measure for Measure*, 208-209.

and thus assumed to bad subjects.¹³⁰ Isabella, as a Catholic nun, is stereotypically depicted as siding with a representative of the church over a representative of the state.

Regardless of Isabella's Catholicism and allegiance to the Friar, her confession to a crime she never committed gives pause to audiences and readers alike, for it appears out of line with the character's construction as a woman rigid in her beliefs, a woman who wished a "more strict restraint" in the opening scenes of the play.¹³¹ If Isabella values her virginity as she claims, why would she confess to breaking her monastic vow of celibacy? Michael Friedman contends that Isabella's reputation, which he describes as both a social and physiological state, is destroyed by her coerced and false confession.¹³² Isabella confesses: "My sisterly remorse confutes mine honour, / and I did yield to him."¹³³ According to Friedman, Isabella's confession, at the direction of the Duke, makes him responsible for her, and because of his role in the destruction of her reputation, he "must now enforce upon himself the same act of recompense he has mandated for Claudio, Angelo, and Lucio."¹³⁴ However, these are not Isabella's words at all. They are the words of the Friar (who is really the Duke in disguise), spoken through Isabella and negated by that same authority—the Duke—yet Isabella makes them her own.

Isabella's interpolation of the word "sister" in this context is a reference not only to her duties as a sister of Claudio, but also as her duties as a novice. Although according

¹³⁰ Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 34.

¹³¹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.4.

¹³² Michael D. Friedman, "'O, Let Him Marry Her!': Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1995): 459.

¹³³ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.103-104.

¹³⁴ Michael Friedman, "'O, Let Him Marry Her!': Matrimony and Recompense in *Measure for Measure*," 461.

to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) the typical meaning of “remorse” is “remorse of conscience” or “deep regret or guilt,” one of the ways in which “remorse” is used in Isabella’s line is more along the lines of Shakespeare’s use of the word in *Othello*: “Let him command, / And to obey shall be in me remorse, / What bloody happiness ever.”¹³⁵ The OED lists this line from *Othello* as an example of another use for “remorse,” in which “remorse” is defined as “an obligation.”¹³⁶ The definition of “confutes” relates to silence. Looking at the OED, the first entry for “confute” is “to be wrong; to overcome silence in argument,” but it has another meaning as well: “to silence (in a physical way).”¹³⁷ “Remorse” in this passage is the agent enacting silence on the honor Isabella holds so dear. Isabella’s words take on a double meaning when looked at in this way. Her sisterly (as in kin) obligation silenced her honor, and, alternately, her sisterly (novice) obligation renders her honor futile; she knows she has not broken her vows, and that is all that matters.

Isabella’s confession (unlike the confession of Abigail) is not believed, and her authority as a Catholic novice is undercut by the Duke as a representative of the state. The Duke responds:

First, his [Angelo’s] integrity
 Stands without blemish...
 Some one hath set you on;

¹³⁵ William Shakespeare, *Othello* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1996), 3.3.467-469.

¹³⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n. “remorse,” www.oed.com (accessed January 10, 2010).

¹³⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n. “confute,” www.oed.com (accessed January 10, 2010). The OED places the second definition of “confute” (To put to silence) as a transitive use in 1614, but given the aptness of this definition, it is reasonable to ponder the possibility of Shakespeare using the word in this way.

Confess the truth, and say by whose advice
Thou cam'st here to complain.¹³⁸

The Duke reclaims his state authority through his response. He effectively takes the responsibility for Isabella's words away from her and places them on someone else. Isabella's only sin is believing the words of the Friar and obeying his directions. In turn, Vincentio's dismissal of her confession places the blame for her false words on the Friar. This puts Isabella in a victim role but allows her to emerge from the escapade with her honor and virginity intact. The Duke benefits from his show of power by reclaiming the word and power of the state as final and overriding the church, thereby reinforcing the stereotype that Catholics are bad subjects who are not to be trusted.

Vincentio continues his attempt to claim complete authority over his subject, but his words and actions up to this point have been reckless and careless. The final lines of the play give the Duke an opportunity to set things right, and he is able to repair, or at least patch, the pairings between Angelo and Mariana, Juliet and Claudio, and Lucio and Kate Keepdown. Conversely, he is unable to pair himself unequivocally with Isabella. Although it is clear Vincentio asks for Isabella's hand in marriage, her response is unclear, and sparse stage directions during this scene offer no direction in terms of her answer. Arguments about Isabella's reaction to the Duke's proposal fall into one of three categories. Natasha Korda takes a more unconventional stand on this scene and argues "there is ample evidence to support *both* Isabella's acceptance of the Duke's offer of

¹³⁸ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.107-108, 112-114.

marriage *and* her return to the nunnery.”¹³⁹ However, most scholars posit Isabella’s silence as either an indication of her acceptance of the Duke’s proposal, or a rejection and resistance of it. Marcia Riefer and Carolyn Brown represent those scholars who feel that Isabella’s silence is disempowering. Riefer argues that in the last lines of the play Isabella “remains speechless, a baffled actress who has run out of lines. The gradual loss of her personal voice during the course of the play has become, finally, a literal loss of voice.”¹⁴⁰ Brown, while agreeing that Isabella loses her voice, takes a more psychoanalytic approach in her analysis: “Shakespeare allows for the possibility that Isabella cannot talk, that she suffers a psychic breakdown with the collapse of her defenses, and that her situation is truly tragic.”¹⁴¹ Barbara Baines counters these arguments by asserting that in Isabella’s silence, she “thus adheres to the rules of the sister of St. Clare: she shows her face but remains silent, perhaps with the key to the convent still in her pocket.”¹⁴² Jessica Slight and Michael Morgan Holmes follow Baines’s lead by contending, “Isabella’s religious devotion actually allows her to resist pressures to marry.”¹⁴³ The evidence, it seems, follows the arguments of the latter group.

At this point in the play several things are clear: Isabella left the convent with hesitation, she took her vows seriously and refused to break them knowing her choice might result in the death of her brother, she remained true to her order throughout the

¹³⁹ Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Economies*, 162.

¹⁴⁰ Marcia Riefer, “‘Instruments of Some More Mightier Member’: The Constriction of Power in *Measure for Measure*,” 167.

¹⁴¹ Carolyn E. Brown, “The Wooing of Duke Vincentio and Isabella of *Measure for Measure*: ‘The Image of It Gives [Them] Content,’” *Shakespeare Studies* 22 (1994): 216.

¹⁴² Barbara J. Baines, “Assaying the Power of Chastity in *Measure for Measure*,” 299.

¹⁴³ Jessica Slight and Michael Morgan Holmes, “Isabella’s Order: Religious Acts and Personal Desires in *Measure for Measure*,” 264.

entire ordeal, never compromising her virginity. Moreover, Vincentio's first marriage offer isn't well timed. The proposal comes just as Claudio is unmuffled. It is safe to assume Isabella would be watching this moment with curiosity, since the Provost comments that the man under the muffle is "[a]s like almost to Claudio as himself."¹⁴⁴ Vincentio, once his proposition to Isabella is verbalized, recognizes his mistake and mutters, "But fitter time for that."¹⁴⁵ Isabella does not respond to his offer at all. The Duke's last proposal comes in the last five lines of the play, but once again, no response is given, and the Duke, Carolyn Brown observes, in an "attempt to cover up...dashes to another topic and scurries everyone off to his palace as if to avoid another awkward lull in events."¹⁴⁶ Brown's observation is correct in that there is "awkward lull in events," but the awkwardness goes beyond the Duke's actions on stage, for the *audience* is left with an "awkward lull in events" too, since there is no stated conclusion to the his question—does Isabella marry him?

As Barbara Baines rightly cautions, to view the final scene of *Measure for Measure* as the silencing of Isabella "is to see it through the Duke's eyes; woman's silence is her submission to the 'natural,' patriarchal ordering of things."¹⁴⁷ That the marriage is never directly agreed upon highlights the problem of interpreting the final scene through the "eyes of the Duke," especially since Isabella spends all five acts of the play maintaining and protecting her most valuable possession—her virginity. To assume

¹⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.489.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.1.487. It cannot go without noting that the Duke's words are eerily similar to the statement made by King Lear ("Some other time for that") when he arrives, already exhibiting signs of madness, at Regan's home in act 2, scene 4, line 126.

¹⁴⁶ Carolyn E. Brown, "The Wooing of Duke Vincentio and Isabella of *Measure for Measure*: 'The Image of It Gives [Them] Content,'" 214.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara J. Baines, "Assaying the Power of Chastity in *Measure for Measure*," 298.

she would quickly and quietly abandon her commitment to the Clares or Catholicism does not follow with the character's development throughout the text. In addition, the Duke's actions throughout the play are corrupt and questionable, from the opening scene where we learn of Vienna's lack of moral and authoritative rule up to the conclusion of the play. He impersonates a friar, manipulates Isabella, Mariana, and Angelo, chooses to lie to Isabella about Claudio's death, and coerces her into confessing to a crime she did not commit. As a Catholic nun, Protestant audiences would expect Isabella to reject or at least question the authority of the state, particularly an authority as misguided as Vincentio. When he is disguised as a friar, Isabella has a reason to follow Vincentio's advice based on their common devotion to the God, but once his identity as the highest state authority in the land is revealed, her reasons for acquiescing to the Duke's requests are removed. Therefore, she would have many more reasons to refuse the proposal than to accept it.

Furthermore, the final lines of the play suggests there is more discussion to take place once the parties arrive at Vincentio's palace: "So, bring us to our palace, where we'll show / What's yet behind, that[s] meet you all should know."¹⁴⁸ These words leave the audience thinking that there is something more to the story, and everything is not settled between the characters. The silence following the Duke's invitation to talk "deliberately delays us from making any immediate conclusion about her [Isabella's] final answer" and acts as another signal that not all of the pairings from act 5 will come to

¹⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.538-539.

fruition.¹⁴⁹ Isabella's action during the proposals—her silence—is a defensive act that prevents her from entering into a forced marriage, and her silence, a skill she learned in the nunnery and part of her vows, also becomes a statement, arguably the most important statement of the play.¹⁵⁰

In *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* defensive virginity plays a role in constructing the characters of Abigail and Isabella respectively, but Marlowe and Shakespeare suggest defensive virginity that gains its power through the veil is not compatible with life beyond the confines of the convent in a post-Reformation culture. Beyond the nunnery gate, virginity has worth based on the untapped potential stored within the virginal body. This potential ultimately makes the virgin a target, and in the city threats to her virginity come from all angles, even from a brother and father. In an effort to retain the power and control of their bodies, Abigail and Isabella enter the cloister, seeking protection from threats to their virginity originating within the home, and threats from the corrupt city culture in which they find themselves immersed. These ladies find their words are more influential within the walls of the nunnery. For Abigail the convent is the only place where her voice holds any power. For Isabella, in the city, where her status as a nun is no longer one of influence, the state's words (via the Duke) overpower her own, but the convent empowers her to speak out and refuse to engage in

¹⁴⁹ Sung-Won Cho, "Renaissance Nun Vs Korean *Gisaeng*: Chastity and Female Celibacy in *Measure for Measure* and 'Chun-Hyang Jeon,'" 574.

¹⁵⁰ In his article "Wishing a More Strict Restraint: Feminist Performance and the Silence of Isabella," Michael Freidman argues that Isabella's silence is not a form of resistance because elsewhere in the play she speaks out in protest. However, Angelo and Claudio are not authorities in the same manner as the Duke/Friar. Vincentio's roles as Duke and friar are of greater authority than Angelo's (surrogate justice) and Claudio's (brother) and would not require the same non-verbal form of protest. Michael Freidman, "Wishing a More Strict Restraint: Feminist Performance and the Silence of Isabella," *Selected Papers from the West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association* 19 (1996): 6.

Angelo's proposition of sexual bribery. Thus, the convent symbolically becomes a place where women can maintain control of their bodies and find their voices.

The Jew of Malta and *Measure for Measure* suggest that the city is no place for life-long virgins who use religion as the main component of their defensive virginity; in the city, the religious power of the virgin is significantly diminished in these plays. Rather than acting as a strength, virginity, with its use potential, makes virgins vulnerable to the multiple threats against them in an urban environment. The convent is the only safe place for women who want to remain virgins to reside, as the cloister offers them protection from the threats to their virginity that occur in the city. Since *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* stage an avenue of defensive virginity that is not readily available to the original audience for the plays, the convent emerges as a place of resistance, the only place where Abigail and Isabella are in control of their own lives, bodies, and choices.

The portrait of defensive virginity is a complicated one in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure*, and although Abigail and Isabella might not seem to have much in common on the surface, the similarities between them are startling. Abigail and Isabella are compared to gemstones as a valuation of their worth in a way that dehumanizes them. They are asked to utilize their bodies sexually in ways they do not wish—Abigail's father forces her to seduce Lodowick and this, unknowingly to her, facilitates the death of Lodowick and Mathias due to the seduction, while Isabella is coerced into the impossible (for her, anyway) task of choosing between her virginity and the life of her brother. In these instances men, a father and brother, present the women in their families as a

sacrificial offering to satisfy their own needs. Speech and silence play an integral role in the characterizations of Abigail and Isabella as well, for their moments of speech, which are facilitated by their status as nuns, are powerful and important within the plot structures of the dramas. Abigail's deathbed confession is her most powerful speech act, as it frees her conscience and ensures that her father will be punished for his evil deeds. *Measure for Measure's* dramatic structure is dependent on Isabella's speech act, since the development of the plot relies on her answer to Angelo's proposition—"yes" signals the loss of her virginity, morality and life within the order of St. Clare, and "no" effectively condemns her brother to death.

Enclosure is the only way to defend oneself from these threats, as exemplified by the safe haven the convent represents in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure*. For Abigail entering the convent removes her from the abusive grip of her father's hands, and it is where her voice is finally heard and respected; for Isabella the convent works as a barrier between her and the morally corrupt city of Vienna lying beyond the convent walls. Accordingly, convents on the early modern stage present interesting sites where power structures and the roles of women can be examined, and defensive virginity can be explored as a possible option for women looking for an alternative to marriage nuptials. Marlowe and Shakespeare reveal that behind the wall of a convent virginity is priceless and equated with spiritual wealth, yet beyond the crannied walls of the nunnery, the value of virginity is predicated on the ways and means of the suitor. However, *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* demonstrate that there really is no place in early modern culture for defensive virginity; the social structures just are not conducive to life-long

virginity in a post-Reformation world, for there are no active nunneries. These plays, like Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, explore and interrogate the place of the virgin and defensive virginity in early modern society through the characters of Abigail and Isabella, but finally show that defensive virginity grounded in religion no longer has enough cultural capital to protect maidens from the hazards of city life.

CHAPTER III

FISCALLY SOLVENT VIRGINS IN *TWELFTH NIGHT* AND
THE ROARING GIRL

The Jew of Malta and *Measure for Measure* depict convents as potential seats of female resistance and respite. Abigail and Isabella's enclosure effectively removes and distances them from the corruption that lies beyond the convent walls, yet within the city they have no power and no place. Defensive virginity in *The Jew of Malta* and *Measure for Measure* is only powerfully enacted within the cloister. However, this chapter presents another strategy of defensive virginity, an aspect through which female characters are able to live outside the cloister as singlewomen while retaining autonomy over their bodies, a feat made possible by the combination of their virginity and fiscal solvency. This portion of my study examines two female characters that control their own purse strings—*Twelfth Night*'s Olivia and Moll from *The Roaring Girl*. In these plays Shakespeare and Marlowe present us with another exploration of the virgin's place in a post-Reformation culture, with a focus on the impact fiscal solvency makes on providing virgins the opportunity to evade marriage. Both women represent different types of financial independence: Olivia is single heiress and Moll an astute businesswoman, and through these representations, Shakespeare, Middleton, and Dekker explore how fiscally solvent virgins who wish to delay or refrain from marriage can practice successful defensive virginity.

Although the theme of finance links *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl*, as I will demonstrate, most scholarship written on these works in the last two decades focuses on cross-dressing and homoeroticism, a popular critical lens that emerged in the late eighties and early nineties. Stephen Greenblatt's 1988 seminal study, "Fiction and Friction," was the first critical work looking specifically at cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night*.¹ "Fiction and Friction" has become the standard text for discussions about early modern cross-dressing and homoeroticism, and his use of *Twelfth Night* has inspired multiple studies of Shakespeare's play from this angle.² As investigations of cross-dressing continue, many other texts have emerged as sites of critical discourse on cross-dressing, most notably *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker. An essay by Stephen Orgel about *The Roaring Girl* sits next to an article on *Twelfth Night* in Susan Zimmerman's *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage* (1992), placing the two plays in close proximity to one another, but not yet in direct conversation.³ Orgel's essay examines Moll's cross-dressing in relation to male desire, while Lisa Jardine's piece on *Twelfth Night* examines cross-dressing along with issues surrounding domestic economies and

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 66-93.

² For discussions of cross-dressing within *Twelfth Night* see Catherine Belsey, "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies" in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, 166-190 (London: Methuen and Co., 1985); Phyllis Rakin, "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," *PMLA* 102, no. 1 (1987): 29-41; Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996); Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization 1579-1642* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992); Dymna Callaghan *Shakespeare Without Women* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Jonathan Crewe, "In the Field of Dreams: Transvestism in *Twelfth Night* and *The Crying Game*," *Representations* 50 (1995): 101-121.

³ Susan Zimmerman, ed. *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

servitude. Jean Howard's "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" offers a broad look at cross-dressing in early modern England in general. She discusses *Twelfth Night*'s Viola and Moll from *The Roaring Girl* in the same article though not in any significant detail.⁴ Despite the brevity of her comments on the plays, Howard's critical approach of placing Moll and Viola together in order to discuss cross-dressing female characters in Renaissance drama has been repeated many times over by scholars such as Theodora Jankowski, Michael Shapiro, and Stephen Orgel.⁵ The importance of addressing the social, cultural, historical, sexual, and gender issues raised by cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl* is evident not only in the presence of such studies, but also the prevalence with which the pairing continues as more voices on the topic enter the critical conversation.

Rather than reworking familiar critical avenues within *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl* that focus on cross-dressing, my comparative study examines Olivia and Moll, not Viola and Moll, for their similarities in economic terms are to date unexplored. Though sexuality plays a role in my study, it is virginity—defensive virginity in particular—rather than homoeroticism or cross-dressing with which this chapter is primarily concerned. Olivia and Moll are what I have termed "fiscally solvent virgins." By "fiscally solvent virgins" I mean that Olivia and Moll are portrayed as women who

⁴ Jean E. Howard, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988): 418-440. Howard expands on this article in her book *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁵ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*; Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespeare Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

have money that is not controlled by a male relative or husband, and they decide how their money is utilized.

Moreover, Olivia and Moll are unwilling to put their fiscal solvency at risk, and combat their potential loss of financial independence by refusing to marry (Moll) or choosing an advantageous husband (Olivia). In an effort to protect their assets, they practice defensive virginity. Olivia and Moll have very different financial circumstances. Olivia is a countess and sole heiress worthy of a Duke's courtship. Moll, on the other hand, makes her money as part of the criminal underbelly of London's canting crew. Olivia and Moll represent varying degrees of female independence and subversion as well. Olivia's fortunes come from her inheritance, and even if she is unwilling to marry a man who is not of her choosing, she does marry the man *she* chooses. Moll's defensive virginity, in contrast, is more subversive in nature, for Moll makes money in the male-dominated world of business, all the while vehemently refusing marriage and overtly thwarting male control. Regardless of their differences, Olivia and Moll have a commonality between them in their financial independence and avoidance of the threats presented to that independence. These characters show the risk sexuality and marriage poses to a woman who handles her own finances, making their virginity defensive in nature. Olivia and Moll's virginity has an additional purpose beyond the virgins mentioned in earlier chapters; it is what allows them to maintain their financial independence, making the finances of these singlewomen just as important as the virginity they guard.

Since living financially independent from men was almost impossible for young ladies, questions regarding economically solvent singlewomen⁶ were circulating in early modern England. Singlewomen, especially poor never-married women, were as scandalous in life as on stage, and were often thought of as prostitutes, whether they were or not. Due to this misconception, it was essentially important for any singlewoman wishing to keep her financial independence to remain a virgin. Singlewomen who lived on their own were at risk for punishment by town officials. Amy Froide's historical study on singlewomen in early modern England notes that punishments for singlewomen ranged from forced departure (in Southampton) to imprisonment (in Norwich).⁷ By remaining a virgin, a singlewoman had the chance to fend off negative perceptions about her morality and keep her single status from drawing the attention of town elders. Olivia exemplifies this idea—she is portrayed as a fiscally solvent virgin who tries to keep her reputation uncorrupted as a way of maintaining her financial independence.

Olivia's status as a virgin is established through Orsino's initial Petrarchan descriptions of her:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence!
That instance was I turn'd into a hart.

⁶ Amy Froide differentiates between two classes of singlewomen. Women who were never married she deems "never-married," while women who are wives or widows are categorized as "ever-married." My essay uses Froide's terms in the same way, for the sake of clarity. Additionally, I have chosen to follow in the footsteps of Froide, Judith Bennet and Natasha Korda (*Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*) by using the compound term "singlewomen" instead of "single women." See Amy M. Froide, "Marital Status and a Category in Early Modern England," in *Singlewomen in the European Past and Never married*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, 236-269 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) and Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) for a detailed analysis of English early modern singlewomen.

⁷ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 21. Froide's book is a historical study of the status of Singlewomen in early modern England.

And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me.⁸

It is well documented that Orsino uses poetry, Petrarchan poetry principally, within *Twelfth Night* to woo (or at least give the appearance of wooing) Olivia.⁹ The influence of Petrarchan verse evolved, as Arthur Marotti explains, from Queen Elizabeth who "...specifically encouraged the use of an amorous vocabulary by her courtiers to express ambition and its vicissitudes."¹⁰ This style of verse gained additional popularity through the publication of sonnet sequences based on Petrarch's style. Petrarch used the myth of Diana in his poetry because the story is applicable to the poetic subject in that "it is a story not only of confrontation with forbidden naked deity but also with forbidden naked femininity."¹¹ In this case Orsino's invocation of Diana is apropos due to Diana's associations with virginity, purity, and her forbidden sexuality.

Specifically, the hart reference in this passage ties Olivia to the goddess Diana and Actaeon. According to legend, Diana turned Actaeon into a stag because he saw her naked body. He was then pursued and killed by his own hounds. Orsino takes on the

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1996), 1.1.19-21. All further references to *Twelfth Night* are from the Riverside edition unless otherwise noted.

⁹ Orsino's poetry has been critiqued as "a particularly indulgent kind of Petrarchan language" that "betray[s] his desire not for Olivia, but for love itself and for the poetry conventionally used to profess it." Jami Ake, "Glimpsing a 'Lesbian' Poetics in 'Twelfth Night,'" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 43, no. 2 (2003): 376.

¹⁰ Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is Not Love': Elizabeth Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *English Literary History* 49, no. 2 (1982): 398. See Marotti's essay for additional information on the ways in which Petrarchan sonnets, especially Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, were constructed with social advancement in mind. See Carol Thomas Neely, "The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequence," *English Literary History* 45, no. 3 (1978): 359-389 regarding the structure and development of Petrarchan styled verse in early modern England.

¹¹ Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 267.

persona of Actaeon, glancing upon the forbidden virgin Olivia. In his words, his desires act as the hounds, chasing him about and torturing him, just as hounds chased Actaeon. Orsino does not, of course, take the comparison to its end (the death of Actaeon at the jaws of the hounds), yet the implications of this passage and its placement are telling. Orsino, like Actaeon, will never be able to satisfy his sexual desire for Olivia since her purity and devotion to celibacy reflects that of Diana. This foreshadowing is given in the initial scenes of the play, leading audiences to entertain the possibility that although Orsino is a Duke and of a higher social class than Olivia, she may be able to reject his advances. Orsino's Petrarchan proclamations of love and the blazons he directs at Olivia continue to appear throughout the text and further emphasize Olivia's virginity. The importance of Orsino's use of Petrarchan conventions is multi-faceted, but tradition does dictate that the object of the male lover's affection is a virgin. Moreover, Diana's actions in the legend suggest she defends her virginity, just as Olivia's actions later in the play are acts of defensive virginity.

Olivia is aligned with Lucrece, another woman famous for her defense of her chastity, as well.¹² Malvolio (mistakenly) sees a seal he recognizes as his mistress's on a letter and attributes the letter to Olivia. He identifies Olivia's seal based on the image it bears, the image of Lucrece: "By your / leave, wax. Soft! And the impressure her Lucrece, / and which she uses to seal. 'Tis my lady."¹³ Not only is Olivia associated with Diana, but she is also aligned with Lucrece through the seal. Lucrece, like Diana, was a popular figure in Renaissance literature. Lucrece was known for her chastity and

¹² Although Lucrece is not a virgin, she is an icon for chastity and consequently virginity.

¹³ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.5.91-93.

the lengths she went to when that chastity was violated—a woman who stabbed herself after being violated by a man who was not her husband—and her association with Olivia reinforces Olivia’s status as a virgin who is willing to take action to protect her body from unwanted advances and even violations.

Olivia’s virginity is not the only thing that gives her authority in *Twelfth Night*. Rather, it is the combination of her virginity and status as a wealthy titled singlewoman. Coupled together, this set of circumstances makes Olivia a woman much desired. As a result, Olivia cloisters herself, cutting herself off from the outside world as much as she can (Sir Toby is determined to bring the outside into her home) in order to avoid the threat of courtship and possible male penetration of her female household from the outside, while at the same time ensuring her reputation is not tarnished. Olivia’s cloistering does not go unnoticed by others in Illyria. Valentine informs the Duke of Olivia’s plan to walk veiled like a “cloisteress:”

and water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine; all this season
A brother’s dead love, which she would keep fresh
and lasting in her sad remembrance.¹⁴

As Marjorie Garber points out, the words “season” and “brine” suggest that Olivia “wishes to preserve and prolong rather than pass through, her feelings of grief.”¹⁵ This prolonging, I propose, is intentional.¹⁶ Olivia makes no attempt to hide her excessive

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.1.27-31.

¹⁵ Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1981), 142.

¹⁶ Critics who ascribe to this view include Terry Reilly, “‘For Such as We Are Made of, Such We Be’: The Construction of Gender in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, or *What you Will*, in *Women in Literature: Reading Through the Lens of Gender*, ed. Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber, 293-296 (Westport,

sadness and grief. It seems everyone in Illyria is aware of her self-cloistering—the Duke, Valentine, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew. Even the Captain has heard about her oath: “she hath abjur’d the [company] and [sight] of men...she will admit no kind of suit, / No, not the Duke’s.”¹⁷ When Viola meets Olivia, Olivia insists on veiling before she hears Orsino’s embassy.¹⁸ The veil further advances the perception that Olivia is cloistering herself in the way that a nun might. The repeated references to Olivia’s isolation emphasize that this seclusion is central to the character’s construction. Through her self-cloistering, Olivia projects that she is unavailable for marriage, and this too is an act of defensive virginity.

Since Olivia is unmarried and owns a home, she is head of her household. However, a singlewoman who was head of her own household for an extended period of time was highly unusual, though not unheard of, in early modern England; the laws and social codes of the period, as Shakespeare demonstrates, were very complex in regards to women, property, and householding.¹⁹ In order to have a chance at living independently, women in Renaissance England had to be designated “single” by law; a woman was single in a legal sense if she was unmarried or widowed.²⁰ As Amy Froide points out, widows had a much easier time retaining control of their households than other

CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern England*, and Jonathan Crewe. Crewe sees Olivia’s cloistering as a “politically illicit closeting,” but I submit that Olivia’s actions are not a closeting/hiding but a defensive act to maintain control over her home and assets. Jonathan Crewe, “In the Field of Dreams: Transvestism in *Twelfth Night* and *The Crying Game*,” 105.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.2.39-40, 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.5.164.

¹⁹ See Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, esp. 16-19 for a discussion of the difficulties of singlewomen householders.

²⁰ Froide differentiates between two classes of singlewomen. Women who were never married she deems “never-married,” while women who are wives or widows are categorized as “ever-married.” My essay uses Froide’s terms in the same way, for the sake of clarity.

singlewomen, especially those who never married, no matter the class of the female.

This is due to the fact that never-married singlewomen, unlike widows, were expected to remain under the control of some male authority within a household; never-married singlewomen could not run their own households, as a general rule.²¹ Widows, however, “had a public and independent place within the patriarchal society;” they could establish or retain their own households, conduct and operate businesses themselves, or work for others.²²

Froide explains the ways in which never-married women might attain a “widow-like” status:

....while singlewomen and widows may have shared a theoretical legal status, never-married women laboured under practical disadvantages that meant that they seldom enjoyed the residential, employment, and welfare opportunities of ever-married women. While such distinctions between ever-married and never-married women were the rule....age and social status allowed a small number of singlewomen to achieve a ‘widow-like’ status, so that the experienced contingently the opportunities reserved customarily for matron who had married.²³

Froide’s study of Southampton households where never-married singlewomen successfully lived as heads of their households concludes that occasionally never-married women were able to live independently through a “widow-like” status. Froide is quick to note that never-married women in her study who thrived have the following characteristics in common: “advanced age, the loss of a surviving parent, and elevated social status.”²⁴ If these characteristics were not present, then a never-married woman

²¹ Amy M. Froide, “Marital Status and a Category in Early Modern England,” 237.

²² Ibid., 241 and 244.

²³ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 17.

²⁴ Amy M. Froide, “Marital Status and a Category in Early Modern England,” 241.

was unlikely to have any possibility of establishing and maintaining her own household. Olivia's character in *Twelfth Night* is an interesting study because she is not a widow, yet her character encourages audiences to read her as one. In many ways Olivia fits into the three categories outlined by Froide, placing her alongside Froide's successful never-married singlewomen.

Unlike Shakespeare's characterization of Orsino, who is addressed as both count and duke in *Twelfth Night*, Olivia's elevated social status is emphasized throughout the play by her language and tipping of servants. As Leslie Hotson points out, Olivia's language connotes her status as a countess who is in charge of her house.²⁵ For example, Olivia uses the royal "we" over and over again: "*We'll* once more hear Orsino's embassy," "Give us the place alone, *we* will hear this divinity," "*We* will draw the curtain and show you the picture," "But when *we* know the grounds and authors of it" (emphasis mine).²⁶ Hotson argues Feste and Viola address Olivia as a princess, advancing his thesis that the character of Olivia is a representation of Queen Elizabeth. This seems to be an overstatement on his part, for the royal "we" is not limited to queens and could just as freely be used by countesses. As a countess, Olivia's repeated use of the royal "we" emphasizes her nobility and authority over others.

Olivia's tipping of servants demonstrates her nobility as well. During Viola/Cesario's²⁷ first visit with Olivia, Olivia tries to tip her: "Fare you well. / I thank

²⁵ Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), (126). The OED entry confirms use of "we" could be used by sovereign or rulers. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., pron., 2.a, "we," <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 19, 2010).

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.166, 1.5.218-219, 1.5.233, 5.1.354.

²⁷ Viola cross-dresses appearing as Cesario up to the final scene of the play where she reveals her identity. I have tried to use Cesario where gender is of particular importance, such as Olivia's proclamations of love.

you for your pains. Spend this for me.”²⁸ Although stage directions are not provided in the text, Olivia’s words indicate that she tries to give Viola a tip for her services. Noble ladies did tip their servants for carrying messages,²⁹ so Olivia’s attempt to tip Viola points to her status as a countess who handles coins to tip servants. The audience is told that Olivia is a countess, but small details such as her language and the tipping of her messengers reinforce Olivia’s elite social status. Her elite status fulfills one of the required categories as outlined by Froide for successful never-married women.

Age is another required component for never-married women who want to run their own households successfully, and Shakespeare addresses this as well. Olivia’s age is a point of conjecture among critics, since it is never clearly identified within the text.³⁰ While this may at first glance appear to be an insignificant point, it is an issue of importance, for portraying Olivia as a successful never-married woman, based on Froide’s study of social trends in successful households headed by singlewomen, requires that she be of advanced age. However, female roles were played by boys in the early modern theatre, so it would be difficult to stage an older woman when a boy player performed the role. In order to combat this, audiences are given several clues that

²⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.282-283.

²⁹ Fiona McNeill, *Poor Women in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61.

³⁰ Ralph Berry says, “Theatrical tradition cast Olivia as an elder of the company’s two leading ladies, until Peter Hall’s Stratford production of 1958...a mature Olivia suits,” but Berry’s assertion that theatrical tradition would cast Olivia as an older woman can not possibly resonate with early modern performances in which the female roles were played by boy actors (pg. 68). Bruce R. Smith also correlates Olivia with an advanced age in a modern “original practices” staging of *Twelfth Night* in which Olivia was played by a 42 year old man, citing the casting of a 42 year old man in a role that would have been played by a pre-pubescent boy as the only viable option in a modern society that would be deeply offended by the thoughts of a young boy kissing a grown man on stage (pg. 75). See Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare and Social Class* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities International, 1988) and Bruce R. Smith, “Ragging *Twelfth Night*,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

indicate Olivia's age is at least a few years older than Viola/Cesario. Early on in the play, when Viola first meets Olivia, there is an interchange between the two regarding Olivia's portrait, which ends in her subsequent unveiling:

OLIVIA. Have you any commission from your lord to
negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text;
but we will draw the curtain, and show you the picture.
Look you, sir, such a one I was at this present. [unveiling.]
Is't not well done?

VIOLA. Excellently done, if God did it all.³¹

The portrait Olivia reveals to the messenger is one painted when she was younger. She unveils the older painting, and then unveils her face, showing how little time has altered her complexion. Olivia prides herself on this fact: "Is't not well done?" In asking Viola this question, Olivia emphasizes that even if years have passed, she still looks the same—the job of maintaining her youth, she indicates, is a job well done. Viola's reaction questions the source of Olivia's graceful aging. Is it a result of her good genes (God) or the work of cosmetics? Viola indicates Olivia's preservation is "excellently done," but Shakespeare's use of "if" as a qualifier for the remainder of the clause indicates that Olivia's youthful appearance is quite possibly attained by cosmetics rather than nature. Olivia's aging is highlighted in this scene by the suggestion that Olivia is older than Viola and may very well need cosmetics to mask her true age.

Additionally, Olivia frequently refers to Viola as a "youth." Upon Viola's first departure from Olivia, her response is: "Methinks I feel this youth's perfections / With an

³¹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.231-236.

invisible and subtle stealth / To creep in at mine eyes,” and later Olivia declares “youth is bought more oft than begg’d or borrow’d.”³² Olivia even alludes to Viola’s future, “...when wit and youth is come to harvest.”³³ Her words indicate that Viola has not yet reached maturity, perhaps even puberty, and her maturity will blossom with time. Olivia’s frequent use of the word “youth” underscores the age disparity between the characters of Viola and Olivia, since if they were of the same age, Olivia would have no need to speak of Viola’s youth as though it is a period of life through which she has passed. Although the boy actor playing Olivia may not have appeared too much older than Viola on stage, Olivia’s language clarifies that she is the elder and wiser of the two. Olivia’s age is important because depicting Olivia as an older woman helps position her within the text as a successful never-married woman in early modern England.

Olivia attempts to convey her age as older in order to present a mature woman to the audience—a mature woman capable of handling her own house and finances. Froide’s research shows that early modern women at the age of menopause or older held more property than younger singlewomen. Moreover, widow householders escaped scrutiny by local authorities, while young, never-married singlewomen were victims of it. Ultimately, older never-married women had a better chance of fending off scrutiny than their younger counterparts, in part because they could pass as “widow-like.”³⁴ This explains why Olivia is portrayed as an older woman (at least older than Viola, who becomes the young ingénue of the play). Constructing Olivia’s character as an older one

³² William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.296-297 and 3.4.3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.1.133.

³⁴ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 19-20.

allows Shakespeare to escape staging the social problems young singlewomen presented in the period, but still permits him to explore the implications of the financially independent singlewoman, especially when Olivia's age is coupled with her designation as a countess.³⁵

There are three qualities, according to Froide, that afforded early modern Englishwomen a better chance of living as a successful never-married singlewoman. So far, Olivia's character embodies two of those requirements—high social status and age. The third variable in the equation for successful singlewomen is the loss of a surviving parent. Interestingly, Olivia has suffered the loss of a surviving parent and a brother. Furthermore, Olivia mourns the passage of her father and brother as though she is a widow, making her appear even more “widow-like” to the audience.

Within the second scene of the play Olivia's status as the only living member of her immediate family is revealed when the Captain describes Olivia as

...the daughter of a count
That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her
In the protections of his son, her brother,
Who shortly also died.³⁶

This passage establishes the loss of Olivia's father and brother, who were her designated guardians. Olivia has no guardian at all, making her the sole heiress of her father's estate and the head of her own household. Olivia's extreme social isolation and self-cloistering

³⁵ It is not within the scope this essay to discuss all the problems associated with singlewomen. The main problem existed in terms of legal self-support—a singlewoman was not allowed to run a business or independently work, but they were also punished for not supporting themselves. This is a problem Shakespeare alleviates by making Olivia's character a countess. See Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 29.

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.2.36-39.

in the name of mourning gives her the appearance of a grieving widow rather than a bereaving sister and daughter.

Characters notice Olivia's excessive mourning, much like her cloistering. Even Feste the jester recognizes Olivia's disproportionate grieving: "The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your / brother's soul, being in heaven."³⁷ Feste points out that Olivia's mourning is, at least to some, foolish. She has been mourning the death of her father and her brother, as we are told by the Captain, "twelve months since."³⁸ The end of official mourning was one year after death, but Olivia's actions early in the play indicate that she plans to continue mourning for some time.³⁹ She ascribes her mourning time as seven years according to Valentine's report to Orsino: "The element itself, till seven years' heat, / shall not behold her face for ample view."⁴⁰ Seven years is well past the legally and socially required year of mourning, and the excess of Olivia's mourning time underscores her desire to remain in control of her inheritance for as long as possible.

The repeated attention given to Olivia's mourning and her "widow-like" behavior affected at least one audience member's perception of the character. John Manningham, an audience member who watched the play in 1601 and recorded his reaction in a dairy, actually mistook Olivia's character for a widow:

At our feast wee has a play called "~~Mid-~~Twelve night, or what you will"...

³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.69-70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.2.38.

³⁹ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 83.

⁴⁰ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.1.25-26.

A good practice in it to make the steward believe his Lady widowe was in Love wuth him, by counterfayting a leter, as from his lady...⁴¹

It is worth mentioning, as Bruce Smith rightly does, that Manningham's misremembrance of Olivia's status is inextricable from his cultural perspective, a cultural perspective shared by most Englishmen and women of the period, and may reflect the fact that "a rich widow would have offered a ticket to financial security for someone like Manningham."⁴² Manningham's flawed memory is not his fault in a sense, for Shakespeare invites a reading of the text (and Olivia) in this way. By creating Olivia's character as a beautiful and wealthy heiress living as head of her own household, Olivia is, in many respects, an ideal mate for any man, especially one like Manningham, who wanted to increase his social status and wealth.

The death of the Count, Olivia's father, left her in the authority of her brother, as mentioned above, and the estate of the Count passed to the eldest son as indicated by either primogeniture, common law, or by way of a will. Because Olivia's brother was not married, it is highly unlikely he would have made out a will based on standard early modern legal practices.⁴³ Therefore, the estate and ownership of the estate (by which I mean all property, movable goods, and money) would have reverted to common law. Common law "chose son over daughter, but daughter over collateral male," making

⁴¹ John Manningham, *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603*, ed. Robert Parker Sorlien (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), 48.

⁴² Bruce R Smith, "Ragging *Twelfth Night*," 65.

⁴³ Wills, if drawn at all, were usually made at the time of marriage as part of a settlement. For more on this and inheritance law, see Eileen Spring, *Land, Law, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Olivia sole heiress of her father's fortune.⁴⁴ A woman's property inheritance did not mean that she retained control over that property in a legal sense. From early feudal times to the end of the nineteenth century the use of land inherited by a woman went to her husband and only came under the heiress's control when she was widowed.⁴⁵ If Olivia is viewed as a widow, or at least as "widow-like," by others, then her authority as a singlewoman is more tenable, especially when coupled with the Shakespeare's theatrical clues that suggest she is an older woman.

Because Queen Elizabeth was a never-married singlewoman, yet the highest authority and power in England, the societal issues surrounding singlewomen and their possible disruptions of standard social codes were of cultural and political concern.⁴⁶ This is evident by the restrictions placed on singlewomen legally and socially within the period. Indeed, studies on

unmarried women in early modern England ha[ve] shown that social categorization functioned to deny single women agency—especially if they had never married; however, the representation of single women in literature remained a site of ideological contention.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England 1300 to 1800*, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶ In *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (1954) Leslie Hotson argues that *Twelfth Night* was performed for Queen Elizabeth in 1601 as part of a twelfth night celebration. Hotson connects the characters of *Twelfth Night* with specific people in Elizabeth's court as well as a visiting dignitary representing Orsino. While the relationship between Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and Queen Elizabeth is apparent—both are unmarried, wealthy, noble women trying to keep control over their homes without the interference of men, and in Elizabeth's case her country—Hotson's thesis has been discredited as noted in the Anne Barton's introduction to *Twelfth Night* because the timeline and theory as a whole is "forced and implausible." See Anne Barton, introduction to *Twelfth Night*, by William Shakespeare, G. Blakemore Evans, ed., 437.

⁴⁷ Adrienne Eastwood, "Controversy and Tragedy in 'The Maid's Tale' and 'The Roaring Girl,'" *Rocky Mountain Review of Literature and Language* 58, no. 2 (2004): 8.

Shakespeare shows us that ideological contention by examining the complex social and legal issues surrounding singlewomen, their abilities to run a household, retain, and manage money; Olivia exemplifies many of these complexities in terms of her financial, legal, and social situation.

Olivia's status as a singlewoman and her "widow-like" actions during the first portion of the play intimates her intention of retaining control over her estate and wealth. There is an acknowledgement within *Twelfth Night* of the societal reality that "while an ever-married [widow] woman might legitimately maintain her own household, the never-married woman who lived on her own did so contingently, and never legitimately."⁴⁸ Sir Toby, Olivia's uncle, represents an ever-present threat to Olivia's claim to her inheritance. Uncles were "the heiress's natural adversary. His interests were not hers."⁴⁹ If an uncle displaced his niece in the succession of the estate, he could replace her, take her land for life and send it to his heirs, effectively removing the daughter from her inheritance completely.⁵⁰ J. C. Holt reminds us the threat of the uncle was so prevalent "as the rules of inheritance were established" that "in romance...the wicked uncle emerge[d] as the archetypal villain."⁵¹ Although *Twelfth Night* is not a romance in the strictest sense of dramatic genre and Sir Toby is not wicked, Holt's assertion underscores the impending danger to Olivia's inheritance Sir Toby's presence poses by demonstrating the societal prevalence of threatening uncles within early modern culture.

⁴⁸ Amy M. Froide, "Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England," 243.

⁴⁹ Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England 1300 to 1800*, 97.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵¹ J. C. Holt, *Colonial England 1066-1215* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1997), 313.

Sir Toby may not be an evil villain, but he brings disorder into Olivia's home by treating "his niece's house as if it were a public inn, and bring[ing] to it an uninvited guest [Sir Andrew] to whom he insists [she] marry."⁵² The chaos he brings to Olivia's home is particularly dangerous for her, since it could draw unwanted attention to her abilities to control a household and, consequently, her status as a never-married singlewomen. However, Sir Toby has no home—the only thing he owns of value is his title of knight—and must reside with his niece. Olivia tries to take command of her home and reputation by restraining Sir Toby's boisterous behavior on several occasions. In the first act Maria conveys Olivia's admonitions to Sir Toby:

By my troth, Sir Toby, you must come in
 Earlier a' nights. Your cousin,⁵³ my lady, takes great
 exceptions to your ill hours...
 Ay, you must confine yourself within
 the modest limits of order...
 That quaffing and drinking will undo you.⁵⁴

Sir Toby's late and loud drunken nights reflect negatively on Olivia as the head of the household. As head of household it is her job to keep order in her home, and allowing Sir Toby's engagement in bad behavior and disorder makes it appear as if Olivia is not in control of her house. Olivia's concern about the appearance of an uncontrolled house, and the perceptions of others regarding her lack of control, highlights the social anxieties surrounding never-married women as heads of their own households. Many men felt that female householders fell into questionable behaviors since they were not ruled or

⁵² John Draper, "Olivia's Household," *PMLA* 49, no .3 (1934): 797.

⁵³ Cousin, in this context refers to kinswomen, not the relationship between Sir Toby and Olivia.

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.3.4-14

controlled by men, and Sir Toby's behavior calls Olivia's ability to manage her house into question. So rampant was this fear that several "municipal authorities throughout England issued edicts against never-married women who lived independently of fathers or masters, or in other words, outside a family or male-controlled household."⁵⁵ This explains why Olivia must and does put her foot down where Sir Toby is concerned.

By act 2 Olivia tires of Sir Toby's antics and the continuous threat his disorder poses to her authority as head of the household. She sends Malvolio to present Sir Toby with an ultimatum:

My lady bade me tell you, that though she harbors you as
Her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders.
If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors,
you are welcome to the house; if not, she is very willing to
bid you farewell.⁵⁶

Sir Toby's actions simply cannot be tolerated if Olivia has any hope of continuing to run her household independently. Although Sir Toby is her closest living relative, he is also a threat to her inheritance, autonomy, and reputation. Olivia's rebuke of Sir Toby lets him know that she may be related to him by blood, but she is not "allied to [his] disorders." For her self-preservation, Olivia cannot tolerate Sir Toby's rambunctious behavior; so much so, that she is willing to force Sir Toby to leave her home if he is unable to get his behavior under control.

Olivia treats Sir Toby as a guest, and at times a child, chiding his behavior and rebuking him for his mistakes. Although Sir Toby behaves badly, he fears Olivia's

⁵⁵ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 20.

⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.3.95-100.

punishment, so Olivia's authority over him is questioned at points yet never overthrown. For example, Olivia rails against Sir Toby for trying to fight Sebastian in act 4. When Sir Toby returns to her home, he decides that the prank he, Feste, Maria, and Sir Alexander are playing on Malvolio at Olivia's expense is just too risky, and he asks the others to stop:

I would we were well rid
of this knavery. If he [Malvolio] may be conveniently deliv'r'd,
I wish he were, for I am now so far in offence with
My niece that I cannot pursue with any safety this
sport [t'] the upshot.⁵⁷

Sir Toby presents a threat to Olivia because as a male and brother to her father, he might have a tenuous legal claim to her inheritance, but she poses a threat to him as well. Without the assistance of his niece, Sir Toby would be without a home or family. Olivia is able to provide him with shelter, food, and she is, after all, his only living relative. Furthermore, if Sir Toby hopes to profit at all by his relationship to Olivia, his best shot at doing so is by keeping on her good side. If he pushes Olivia too far and his offences are too great, his "safety" is at risk. Olivia has power over him as head of the household, and they are both aware of just how that power functions.

Feste the clown, like Sir Toby, is a little disorderly, and Olivia holds authority over him as his employer. However, unlike Sir Toby, Feste points out Olivia's weaknesses when it comes to running a household without any concern for his job or Olivia's anger. He does not believe Maria's assertions that Olivia will hang him for his

⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 4.2.67-71.

absence from her household. To Maria's admonitions he responds, "Let her hang me! He that is well hang'd in / this world needs to fear no colors."⁵⁸ Feste's retort is insubordination, yet his disobedience invokes a gender binary—Feste as a man is "well hang'd" and has no fear of a woman, even if she is his superior. Later Feste exchanges barbs with Viola about his position in Olivia's home. Viola innocently asks Feste if he is Lady Olivia's fool. Feste responds by saying,

No, indeed, sir, the Lady Olivia has no folly.
 She will keep no fool, sir, till she be married, and
 Fools are as like husbands as pilchers are to herrings,
 The husband's the bigger. I am indeed not her fool,
 but her corrupter of words.⁵⁹

Although there are several puns within these lines, the pun on "fool" in this passage warrants closer inspection. According to Feste, Olivia will keep no fools, meaning him, until she is married. Fools are like small fish when compared to husbands and herrings. Feste claims he is not Olivia's fool, but rather a "pilcher" or small fish Olivia cannot maintain. Through these words Feste implies that Olivia is incapable of keeping a husband too, for if she cannot even keep a small fish (a fool), a husband would be a total impossibility. Even the clown Feste thinks Olivia's ability to run a household is inadequate, and his opinions reflect the fact that Olivia is a singlewoman who foolishly has no male authority in her life to control her and her house.

Regardless of Olivia's inadequacies as head of the house, as sole heiress to her father's fortunes, she does control the money in the home. In fact, money, and all its

⁵⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.5-6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.1.32-36.

legal implications may very well be the most important thematic aspect of *Twelfth Night*. Porter Williams Jr. observes that “seldom in a play does money flow so freely” as in *Twelfth Night*.⁶⁰ What makes *Twelfth Night* different from many other early modern English plays is that Olivia, a never-married singlewoman, is central to the economic issues of the play not just in terms of her marriageability, or status as head of the household, but also due to her status as a *femme sole*, a financially independent woman. Although Olivia may have trouble settling Sir Toby down and keeping Feste at work, she manages money like other men in the play, especially Orsino. Olivia brokers jewels and money just as Orsino brokers them, and both characters make most of their monetary exchanges in the name of love.

Olivia is in charge of her finances; however, because she is a countess and can bear children, if and whom she marries has dynastic implications in terms of passing on her title and inheritance. Orsino is well aware of Olivia’s fortunes and attempts to reassure her, through Viola, that his love is based on her beauty rather than her money: “Tell her, I hold as giddily as fortune; / But ‘tis that miracle and queen of gems / That nature pranks her in attracts my soul.”⁶¹ Even though Orsino’s declarations deny any economic motivations, Stephanie Chamberlain observes that Orsino’s “unrequited love for Olivia suggests dynastic ambitions, the joining of two families and thus two estates.”⁶² According to the conversations and rumors running about Illyria, Olivia’s title and endowment would make an excellent noble alliance with the Duke. Olivia’s

⁶⁰ Porter Williams, Jr, “Mistakes in *Twelfth Night* and Their Resolution,” *PMLA* 76 (1961): 194.

⁶¹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.4.84-86.

⁶² Stephanie Chamberlain, “‘Rings and Things’ in *Twelfth Night*: Gift Exchange, Debt and the Early Modern Matrimonial Economy,” *The Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 7 (2007): 5.

excessive mourning and attempts to cloister herself in response to Orsino's wooing signify the threat presented by Orsino's ambition and the inherent danger it poses to her inheritance. For Olivia, it is not that she refuses to marry, but simply that she refuses to marry Orsino, a man with more power and money than herself. Olivia's status as a "widow-like" countess and heiress allows her to reject Orsino's advances; this is only possible because of her fiscal solvency.

Indeed, romantic relationships are frequently tied to money in *Twelfth Night*. There is an undercurrent throughout the play that implies love and sex can be bought and sold (or traded for a ring). Olivia and Orsino use their wealth as a negotiating tool in their romantic relationships. Olivia, in her interactions with Viola/Cesario, mirrors the actions of Orsino, for they both try to exchange rings with the mates they pursue, a pursuit that is motivated, at least in part, by economics. Orsino sends a ring to Olivia in the second act; however, the ring never surfaces following Orsino's command: "give her this jewel; say / My love can give no place, bide no denay."⁶³ Although Orsino swears that Olivia cannot deny his love or the jewel, she does, and the jewel is not mentioned again. Olivia's refusal of the ring is made possible only by her fiscal solvency, as she has no need for money, land, or titles from Orsino—she has her own.

The gifts Olivia gives to Viola/Cesario, however, reappear and become a source of anxiety for her/him because the transaction takes place with "one unable to repay the resulting debt the ring has imposed."⁶⁴ Cesario is placed in an impossible situation by

⁶³ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.4.124-125.

⁶⁴ Stephanie Chamberlain, "'Rings and Things' in *Twelfth Night*: Gift Exchange, Debt and the Early Modern Matrimonial Economy," 6.

Olivia's first gift of a ring: "As Cesario she [Viola] clearly tells Olivia that he [Cesario] can never love her, but even so, she/he accepts Olivia's gifts, sparing her the pain and rejection of having these symbols of love rejected."⁶⁵ Cesario's position forces her into a tug of war between loyalties to her master, her true love for Orsino, and the social obligation represented by Olivia's gift. For Olivia, the ring is much more, and she is aware of the social strings attached to her gift. It is not simply a token of affection, but also acts as a physical representation of Cesario's future obligation to marry her. In forcing Cesario to accept such a gift, Olivia removes herself from the marriage market and effectively cuts Orsino out of the picture.

Olivia seems certain Cesario will succumb to the seduction of money rather than beauty. She first gives Cesario a ring, then later ruminates about which display of wealth might endure him to her more: "How shall I feast him? What bestow of him? / For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd. / I speak too loud."⁶⁶ Olivia repeats the actions of Orsino by actively wooing Cesario. She notes that young people do not respond as well when the pursuer begs for love or takes it.⁶⁷ So instead she plans to capture Orsino's interest with her wealth, a strategy that may be more successful. In saying she is "speaking too loud," Olivia indicates she has a plan in place; she will woo the youthful Cesario with her money, an action she is at liberty to take because she controls the household purse strings.

⁶⁵ Camille Slights, "The Principle of Recompense in 'Twelfth Night,'" *The Modern Language Review* 77, no. 3 (1982): 544.

⁶⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 3.4.2-4.

⁶⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the definition of "borrowed" as: "Taken on loan." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., ppl. a. "Borrowed," <http://www.oed.com> (accessed January 20, 2009).

In act 3 Olivia bestows another gift on Cesario. This time the gift is a locket bearing her picture. The words expressed by the two after Olivia gives Cesario the gift are steeped in terminology related to exchange:

OLIVIA. Refuse it not; it hath no tongue to vex you;
And I beseech you come again tomorrow.
What shall you ask of me that I'll deny,
That honor sav'd, may upon be asking?

VIOLA. Nothing but this—your true love for my master.

OLIVIA. How with mine honor may I give him that
which I have given to you?⁶⁸

Olivia reminds Cesario he/she really cannot refuse the gift, for as his/her social superior she demands he/she accept this new trifle of her affection. The exchange cycle is repeated, and again Cesario is put into the awkward position of accepting the implied commitment associated with the gift or insulting a woman of superior class by rejecting her. Olivia's actions make it clear that she is no longer rejecting Orsino because she is in mourning. She rejects him because she now has a commitment, albeit made in jewels, to Cesario, and it is a commitment she will not break.

Olivia's decision to marry in *Twelfth Night* is a romantic choice and economic one. Her marriageability is central to the theme of *Twelfth Night*. In fact, "the play insists upon the perfect eligibility of Olivia: she is not only a great heiress but, in the wake of the deaths of her father and only brother, the sole ruler of her fortunes."⁶⁹ This insistence leads to Olivia's declarations of self-cloistering and her "widow-like" persona

⁶⁸ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 3.4.209-214.

⁶⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 68.

as a defensive move, for in rejecting the affections of Orsino, Olivia protects her family fortune and her independence from being subsumed in a marriage to a man who is her social superior. Although Olivia has no desire to marry Orsino, Sir Toby rightly assesses that his niece will indeed marry at some point: “She’ll none o’th’ Count. She’ll not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, or wit; I / have heard her swear it.”⁷⁰ Sir Toby’s words point out that Olivia will not marry anyone who is above her in a number of ways. Olivia’s declarations are reflective of the early modern legal system in which the best hope she has of hanging on to her inheritance is to marry someone who can not or will not take it away, a man who is of lower rank, lower income, younger, and more foolish than her. Olivia’s character demonstrates an awareness of her precarious position as heiress and executrix through her words and actions, which ultimately motivates her refusal to marry Orsino and fuels her desire to marry Cesario.

Ultimately, Olivia’s love for Cesario/Sebastian has just as much to do with her attempts to keep control of her household and money as true love, for “if she marries someone of her station or above, Olivia will lose everything—title, power, wealth.”⁷¹ If, on the other hand, Olivia marries a man who is beneath her in terms of title, power and wealth, she has a chance of retaining some of what she owns. Olivia is acutely aware of the legalities surrounding her inheritance and marriage, as demonstrated in act 3, when Olivia mentions her dowry. Malvolio approaches Olivia speaking about the letter she knows nothing about. His words are disturbing and communicate that one of Olivia’s

⁷⁰ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.3.109-111.

⁷¹ Terry Reilly, “‘For Such as We Are Made of Such We Be’: The Construction of Gender in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, or *What You Will*,” 294.

servants is in need of assistance, so she orders Maria to “[l]et some of my people have special care of him. I / would not miscarry him for half my dowry.”⁷² This passage demonstrates Olivia’s role in the house—that of a mistress—while at the same time showing that Olivia knows about dowries and controls her dowry, further signaling she plans to carry out her marriage negotiations on her own in order to maintain some control of her inheritance.

Olivia is attracted to many of the things Cesario represents, making him an ideal mate for her in her eyes because he may be a husband who will permit her to retain control of her finances. After all, Cesario’s occupation as a messenger denotes his lower class, and he is younger than Olivia. Michael Shapiro argues, “Olivia’s entreaty to a social inferior plus her sudden abandonment of her vow of mourning, however lightly held, is a sure sign that powerful forces of sexual attraction are stirring in her.”⁷³ However, this assertion assumes that Olivia has not forethought, agency, or knowledge of her legal and financial positions. Just before Olivia’s assertions of love are revealed, Olivia takes a moment to ask Cesario about his parentage:

OLIVIA. You might do much.
What is your parentage?

VIOLA. Above my fortunes, yet my state is well. I am a gentleman.⁷⁴

⁷² William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 3.4.62-63.

⁷³ Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespeare Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages*, 153.

⁷⁴ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.276-278

Olivia's questions are calculated, as her first phrase, "you might do much," suggests. The implication is that Cesario might indeed do—marrying him would place a male in the home Olivia struggles so hard to control. Because Cesario is a gentleman, there would not be too much of a scandal, and due to his youth and inferior wealth, Olivia may be afforded control of her inheritance even after the marriage.⁷⁵ Olivia's words suggest she is not simply moved by a "sexual attraction," but moved by the many qualities in Cesario that are beneficial to her if she has a chance of holding onto any of her financial independence.

Olivia treats Viola/Cesario as a servant for most of the play because Viola is in disguise as a servant, yet despite Olivia's confessions of love for Cesario, she continues to address her/him as a person of lower class rather than a lover. Olivia's treatment of Cesario is a precursor to the role Olivia hopes her future husband will have—that of a man dwarfed in social standing and wealth by his wife. Olivia's demeaning attitude towards Cesario is established by the following interchange between Olivia and Sebastian (Cesario's long lost twin brother whom Olivia mistakes for Cesario):

OLIVIA. Nay, come, I prithee. Would thou'dst be
 rul'd by me?

SEBASTIAN. Madam, I will!

OLIVIA. O, say so and so be!⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Although the play gives no indications as to the legal arrangements between Olivia and Viola/Sebastian, there is legal precedent for women of elite social standing in early modern England to retain control of their property even after marriage via marriage settlements that are akin to modern day pre-nuptial agreements. See Amy Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 24-26 and 99-151.

⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 4.1.63-66.

In this dialogue Olivia's intentions regarding her marriage are revealed. She does not want a husband to protect her or rule over her; rather, she want him to be ruled *by* her. Her initial question (Would thou'dst be ruled by me?) is not open ended; it begs for a simple response of either "yes" or "no." Olivia's reaction to Sebastian also points to her authority, as her response—"say so, and be so!"—is a demand rather than an expression of joy or love. Olivia commands Sebastian to make good on his promise—speak his vows and be ruled by her, his wife.

There is a service relationship between Olivia and her soon-to-be husband, a bond of service that would not have been possible between Olivia and Orsino. Sebastian "takes Olivia to be spontaneously offering an invitation to enter her *service*—an invitation he accepts as the very 'dream' he wished for," yet the type of service she has in mind, marriage, is not exactly what he expects.⁷⁷ After all, Sebastian is not in the same class as Olivia, and his marriage to her "definitely constitutes a rise in class."⁷⁸ In a sense, he will be at her service through marriage, and she makes it abundantly clear that she will retain control of herself, her household, and estate. Additionally, Sebastian's late entrance into the play leads to an under-developed and weaker character, which further contrasts with the strong-willed Olivia.

Although Olivia marries, her marriage to Sebastian does not appear to diminish her authority in the household, as evidenced by the way she continues to give orders to

⁷⁷ Lisa Jardine, "Twins and travesties: gender, dependency and sexual availability in *Twelfth Night*," in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (London: Routledge, 1992), 32. Jardine goes on to argue that Olivia's offer is a "profession of passionate, sexual love and a marriage proposal," and on that point Jardine and I differ, for I contend that Olivia's motives are not solely emotional, but also economic.

⁷⁸ Mihoko Suzuki, "Gender, Class and the Social Order in Late Elizabethan Drama," *Theatre Journal* 44, no. 1 (1992): 40.

members of her household. In the final scene of the play, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew enter bleeding from injuries obtained in a fight with Sebastian. Olivia directs those around her regarding care for Sir Toby, a member of her household: "Away with him [Sir Toby]! Who hath made this havoc / with them?...Get him to bed, and let his hurt be look'd to."⁷⁹ These commands occur late in the play, after Olivia is married, and show Olivia still maintains control of her house. Sebastian's response is full of sorrow and remorse: "I am sorry, madame, I have hurt your kinsman...Pardon me, sweet one."⁸⁰ His language indicates that he truly wishes to serve his mistress, even begging her pardon. Rather than calling Olivia "wife" or "dear," Sebastian uses the word "madame." That he does so is indicative of the power relationship between them because the word "madame" is associated with aristocracy. These words and actions suggest Sebastian is not a strong character, but a man in service to his wife. Olivia specifically chooses to marry Cesario/Sebastian due to his lower social status and in an effort to protect her inheritance, for Sir Toby remains a threat to Olivia as long as she remains single.

There are no other collateral males, or females for that matter, mentioned in the play. Only Sir Toby could be a beneficiary of Olivia's wealth if she were to pass away or even if she chose to relinquish control of her house to a man. Through marriage, Olivia, much like Gertrude in her displacement of Hamlet from his inheritance, has the opportunity to ensure that Sir Toby has no legal claim to her inheritance.⁸¹ Additionally, any child of Olivia's would step in front of Sir Toby as an heir. Therefore, Olivia's

⁷⁹ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 5.1.202-201, 208.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.1.209, 214.

⁸¹ Lisa Jardine discusses inheritance regarding *Hamlet* on page 92 of *Still Harping on Daughters*. Although her observations are about the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude, the result, legally, is similar to the situation between Olivia and Sir Toby.

choice of a husband is more economically motivated than it might appear because her marriage to Sebastian offers protection from Sir Toby's potential claim to Olivia's inheritance, while at the same time providing the possibility that Olivia, due to Sebastian's inferior financial and social standing, might be able to hold onto some, if not all, of the control within their household.

While Olivia uses her finances to enact defensive virginity so she can put off Orsino to secure a marriage that is advantageous to facilitating maintenance of her financial independence, in *The Roaring Girl* Moll uses her fiscal solvency to allow her to practice defensive virginity and remain a successful never-married singlewoman. In this way, Moll is a more subversive character, as she rejects marriage completely, making her a symbol of female resistance that epitomizes the perceived threats financially autonomous singlewomen represent in early modern culture. Because of Olivia's social and economic status, her virginity is never questioned, but Moll is a lower-class businesswoman, factors that call into question Moll's reputation and virginity.

Moll's presentation as such an anomaly in *The Roaring Girl* (she is a never-married singlewoman, yet runs a successful business and acts as head of her own household) leads the characters, both male and female, to insinuate that she is a sexually deviant monster. Although there is a significant amount of sexual language in *The Roaring Girl* – spoken about Moll, to Moll, and by Moll – Moll is a virgin. In fact, “there is no textual evidence to show that Moll engages in any sexual activity with men,” or with women.⁸² Moll maintains her virginity as a defensive act in order to retain her

⁸² Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, 187.

autonomy and independence, even though other characters call her virginity into question and equate her with something unnatural. Prior to Moll's entrance on the stage, she is stigmatized as Sir Alexander proceeds to call her a "scurvy woman," "a creature," "a varlet," and a "naughty pack."⁸³ Sir Alexander's descriptions of Moll depict her as a deviant woman by portraying her as a hermaphrodite:

...It is a thing
 One know not how to name; her birth began
 Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,
 Man more than woman, and—which none can hap—
 The sun gives her two shadows to one shape.
 Nay, more, let this strang thing walk, stand, or sit.⁸⁴

Sir Alexander's description of Moll mirrors, in some ways, Feste's negative descriptions of Olivia. Both men see these never-married women as unnatural and odd. However, Feste brands Olivia as a fool, a mild label when compared to Sir Alexander's declarations that Moll is a hermaphrodite. According to Sir Alexander, Moll is not a woman because she acts like a man and dresses like a man, but she cannot be a man because she is a woman, and a woman should not be afforded the power of a man. He goes on to associate "shadows" and strangeness ("this strang thing") with Moll, highlighting her unnaturalness. His words lead Sir Davy to claim Moll is "[a] monster. 'Tis some monster," to which Sir Alexander replies, "She's a varlet."⁸⁵ Moll's association with monstrosity comes from the very things that give her power in the play—money, a home,

⁸³ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, "The Roaring Girl," in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 1.2.126, 128, 137, 139. All references come from the Bevington edition unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁴ Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 1.2.129-134.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.5.135-136.

a business—and her monstrous nature is frequently tied back to her sexuality, as demonstrated by the exchange between Sir Alexander and Sir Davies. Since she uses her fiscal solvency to avoid marriage all together, in contrast to Olivia, the greater degree of her subversiveness is reflected in these extreme characterizations, which are directly linked to her sexuality. Moll's virginity works as a marker that represents her refusal to take part in the social conventions of sex and marriage in an effort to keep her fiscal solvency. This refusal is seen as unnatural and monstrous because it goes against the social codes and religious teachings that were prominent in the period.

Moll's penchant for dressing in male clothing and her manly appearance adds to preconceptions regarding her monstrosity and sexuality. People believe she is both inhuman and sexually loose, for women who dressed like men in early modern England aroused suspicion because

when women took men's clothes, they symbolically left their subordinate positions. They became masterless women, and this threatened overthrow of hierarchy was discursively read as the eruption of uncontrolled sexuality...The mannish woman not only produces bastards but is one herself and she threatens the collapse of the entire class system.⁸⁶

Moll is masterless, and her economic, social, and sexual threats permeate *The Roaring Girl*. One of the reasons women who cross-dressed were thought of as more sexually active was the belief that dressing in male styles gave “quick and easy access to their bodies—the dress of a whore.”⁸⁷ Moll's sexuality is constantly in question,⁸⁸ yet

⁸⁶ Jean Howard, “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988): 424, 425.

⁸⁷ Jane Baston, “Rehabilitating Moll's Subversion in *The Roaring Girl*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 37, no. 2 (1997): 322.

Middleton and Dekker go out of their way to insist that Moll is a chaste virgin. Her threat is amplified since she refuses to confirm to cultural norms yet upholds for others the very social codes that would doom her. As Lloyd Edward Kermode indicates, Moll's masculine clothing is only part of what makes Moll seem manly; throughout the play her stature is described as large.⁸⁹ There are several passages that note Moll's size. In the second act "Goshank admires her for having 'so much flesh and so much nimbleness put together;' she is 'sweet, plump Moll;' she has 'great limbs;' the tailor informs us her thigh is 'a lusty one' and these references continue through the duration of the play."⁹⁰ Moll dresses like a man, and her physique is masculine, large and imposing, further emphasizing that she is a masculine, threatening and unnatural woman.

However, Moll is dangerous to women in the play as well. To the merchants's wives Moll is particularly troubling, not only because of her insistence on cross-dressing and her large physical presence, but also because of her virginity. Indeed, "Moll's moral character derives in part from her ability to separate herself from the hawking and adultery of the shop owners."⁹¹ The merchants's wives are all sexually loose, especially when compared to Moll, and their anger and resentment towards her appears as jealousy rather than disgust. Each of the shops in the play sells luxury items: the Openworks sell fine linens, the Tiltyards sell feathers, and the Gallipots own an apothecary shop.

⁸⁸ Mary Beth Rose notes that Moll is deemed "mannish with deformed and illicit sexuality" by women as well as men in *The Roaring Girl*. Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in The Roaring Girl," *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no.3 (1984): 380.

⁸⁹ Lloyd Edward Kermode, "Destination Doomsday: Desires for Change and Changeable Desires in *The Roaring Girl*," *English Literary Renaissance* 27, no. 3 (1997): 421-442.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 432-433.

⁹¹ Aaron Kitch, "The Character of Credit and the Problem of Belief in Middleton's City Comedies," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (2007): 413.

Although these merchants are peddlers of consumptionism, they are also involved in consumption as well. This is especially true of Rosamond Openwork and Prudence Gallipot, who consume (or at least attempt to consume) sex outside of their marriage beds. The open and scolding mouths of Rosamond Openwork and Prudence Gallipot allude to their promiscuity. As Karen Newman has pointed out, in Renaissance drama:

...the synecdochic representation of feminine desire – sexual or acquisitive – [i]s an open mouth. The whore's insatiable genitals were represented as a thirsty mouth, and the talking woman was everywhere equated with a voracious sexuality that in turn abetted her avid consumerism: scolds were regularly accused of both extravagance and adultery.⁹²

Rosamond and Prudence are scolds and adulterers. The fact that these women are constantly scolding their husbands underscores their consumerism and their sexuality. Moll, on the other hand, has no husband to scold, nor does she engage in licentious sexual behavior.

Ironically, it is Sir Alexander, a man who calls Moll “a varlet” early in the play, who initiates the first exchange in which Moll's name and the word “chaste” are mentioned together. Sir Alexander pays Trapdoor to seduce Moll assuming that “[d]eep spendings / May draw her that's most chaste to a man's bosom.”⁹³ Sir Alexander presumes there is a price attached to Moll's sexuality, yet he also assumes the cost will be high and require “deep spendings,” insinuating that she may not relinquish herself to Trapdoor without trouble. While Trapdoor thinks of several sexual ways to defame Moll, Sir Alexander explains that those tactics may not work:

⁹² Karen Newman, “City Talk: Femininity and Commodification in Jonson's *Epiocene*,” *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 134.

⁹³ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 1.2.222-223.

TRAPDOOR. The jingling of golden bells, and a good fool with
a hobbyhorse, will draw all the whores i'th'town to dance in a morris.

SIR ALEXANDER. Or rather, for that's best (they say sometimes
She goes in breeches), follow her as her man[servant].

TRAPDOOR. And when her breeches are off, she shall follow
me.

SIR ALEXANDER. Beat thy brains to serve her.⁹⁴

Sir Alexander pleads with Trapdoor to execute his plan quickly so Moll will be arrested and/or disgraced before she can marry Sebastian. As Trapdoor walks away, Sir Alexander's fear that Moll cannot be subdued quickly is evident in his words: "God-a-mercy. Lose no time."⁹⁵ Sir Alexander's actions, which represent those of an upper class male, demonstrate a strong concern that his family will be socially degraded by Sebastian's marriage to a woman who is beneath him in terms of wealth and social status. Sir Alexander believes it will take a lot of money to subdue Moll because she already has her own cash; her financial independence makes her more difficult to control than other, less fortunate women of her class. Additionally, Sir Alexander suggests Trapdoor will be able to get close to Moll by working for her as a manservant rather than engaging her in sex. This is a particularly interesting interchange, as Sir Alexander seems to acknowledge in his directions to Trapdoor Moll's control of men, men who are in her service, which implies that she does, in fact, have some authority.

Moll's relationship with Sebastian places her at odds with the noble Sir Alexander, but she elicits anxiety in lower class men as well. The gallant named

⁹⁴ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 1.2.224-231.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.2.254.

Laxton⁹⁶ figures prominently in one of the most analyzed scenes in *The Roaring Girl*.

The character, whose name is itself a sexual pun—“Laxton” lacks stones or testicles—is drawn to Moll sexually. Laxton seems to be of the same mind as Sir Alexander about Moll in regards to her morality, and he assumes she will sleep with him for money.

Laxton’s description of Moll highlights her virginity, and like Sir Alexander and Trapdoor, he discusses Moll’s sexuality in relation to money:

...I’ll lay
hard siege to her. Money is that aqua fortis⁹⁷ that eats into
many a maidenhead. Where the walls are flesh and blood,
I’ll ever pierce through with a golden auger.⁹⁸

The language of this passage indicates that Laxton thinks of Moll as a virgin. Money, according to him, will destroy Moll’s maidenhead, just as it has destroyed many others.

The images Laxton puts forth are full of sexual violence. The imagery of a virgin hymen pierced with “a golden auger” that hits walls of flesh and blood is grotesque when thought of in terms of sexual violence. Ironically, even though Laxton’s description of Moll’s body includes images of virginity, Laxton still believes Moll to be a prostitute. His attraction to Moll is not simply based on sexual longing, but also a desire to control a woman that no other man has succeeded in controlling. Laxton’s desires are linked to economic domination as well, for he thinks money and a “golden auger” will corrupt

⁹⁶ For a detailed discussion of social class and its relationship to space in *The Roaring Girl*, see Kelly J. Stage, “*The Roaring Girl*’s London Spaces,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49, no. 2 (2009): 417-436. Her discussion of Laxton as a gallant occurs on page 419.

⁹⁷ Valerie Foreman shrewdly points out that aquafortis is a form of nitric acid, which was used in early modern England to assist in counterfeiting processes. Valerie Foreman, “Marked Angels: Counterfeits, Commodities, and *The Roaring Girl*,” *Renaissance Society of America* 54, no. 2 (2001): 1536.

⁹⁸ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 2.1.199-203.

Moll. The violent acts Laxton relays—eating into Moll’s maidenhead and piercing through her with the auger—connect money, sexuality, and control to create an image of complete male domination over Moll.

Moll’s virginity is more difficult to see than Olivia’s because many characters in *The Roaring Girl*, like Laxton, connect Moll with prostitution based on her low class and status as a working never-married woman. Furthermore, Moll’s instrument of choice, the viol, has been used as a way to read her character as a sexually active one. It was acceptable for women to play musical instruments only under certain circumstances in early modern England because female musicians were capable of inciting a spiritual response within men that could be either “pure spiritual ecstasy or destructive physical passion.”⁹⁹ Appropriate instruments included virginals, viols,¹⁰⁰ or lutes that women played in private, either for their own amusement or to entertain family, but not usually in public.¹⁰¹ Although some instruments and types of music were deemed appropriate for women, the potential danger of music (its ability to elicit male lust) was still an underlying concern that caused many women to keep their musical skills to themselves.¹⁰² Moll’s viol, according to Jean Howard, is problematic because the instrument “is played with legs akimbo.”¹⁰³ Critics who read Moll as a sexually active character, such as Jean Howard and Theodora Jankowski, couch their interpretations of

⁹⁹ Linda Austern, “‘Sing Again Syren’: The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1989): 420.

¹⁰⁰ Virginals are small keyed instruments, like a spinet and viols were stringed instruments played with a bow. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n., 1.a, “viol,” <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 19, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Linda Austern, “‘Sing Again Syren’: The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature,” 427.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 447.

¹⁰³ Jean Howard, “Sex and Social Conflict: The Erotics of *The Roaring Girl*,” in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 184.

the viol scene in the autoerotic because playing the viol requires the knees be open.

Howard and Jankowski reinforce the idea that Moll is a virgin who still enjoys sex by correlating Moll's skill with her musical instrument and positioning of said instrument (with legs open) to skill manipulating her sexual instrument and/or the instruments of men, a type of non-penetrating sex.¹⁰⁴

The viol, I suggest, has another function in this scene beyond the sexual, acting as a symbol of Moll's power and economic autonomy. As Linda Austern notes, in Renaissance literature "[t]he *most chaste* female musicians...tend to express their innermost thoughts to lutes, viols, and virginals in privacy" (emphasis mine), and the literature, she contends, correctly reflects early modern "ideas and attitudes toward musical practices by women."¹⁰⁵ Based on Austern's study, the viol is an instrument typically associated with practices of gentlewomen with good reputations and does not in and of itself correlate Moll's instrument choice with her sexuality. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that audiences watching the play might recognize Moll's instrument, the viol, as an instrument suggestive of a moral and virginal female musician rather than an indictment of promiscuity.

This is especially possible when looking at the context of the scene in which Moll's musicianship is discussed. Moll tells Sebastian that she never "came into a gentleman's chamber and let his / instrument hang by the walls."¹⁰⁶ She later qualifies this statement by saying, "I ne'er came into / that chamber yet where I took down the

¹⁰⁴ Jean Howard, "Sex and Social Conflict: The Erotics of *The Roaring Girl*," 184 and Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, 188-189.

¹⁰⁵ Linda Austern, "'Sing Again Syren': The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature," 436 and 435.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 4.1.89-90.

instrument myself.”¹⁰⁷ She goes on to sing a dream to Sebastian. Her words refer to her interactions with men, though they are not necessarily sexual interactions. Rather, the viol and Moll’s ability to play it becomes a symbol of her autonomy. Moll states that she can behave/play like men, using the tools/instruments of men, but she is not taking any power that was not given to her; she saw an opportunity for herself and she took it. The viol also functions as a symbol of Moll’s economic success. Austern notes that only the very wealthy could afford music lessons and of the very wealthy, many parents chose not to educate their daughters in music since they would grow up to run households, leaving no time for leisure activities such as music.¹⁰⁸ That Moll has the time for music underscores her financial success, for she clearly has enough leisure time to devote to music.

The interchange between Sebastian and Moll, as Howard and Jankowski note, is one that can be read in sexual innuendo, especially since the conversation takes place in a bed chamber, yet it is important to point out that at this point in the play Moll is acting as Sebastian’s fiancé, and it would not be improper for a woman to sing or play an instrument for a man to whom she was engaged. Additionally, Moll is in the room with Sebastian and Mary; both women (Moll and Mary) are dressed as men, making it appear as though a man is singing and playing in front of other men. As soon as Moll finishes relaying the dream to Sebastian and Mary, she puts the instrument away, recognizing that it is only proper to use music and the viol in a dream. She states: “Hang up the viol now,

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 4.1.95-96.

¹⁰⁸ Linda Austern, “‘Sing Again Syren’: The Female Musician and Sexual Enchantment in Elizabethan Life and Literature,” 430-431.

/ sir; all this while I was in a dream. One shall lie rudely then; / but being awake, I keep my legs together.”¹⁰⁹ Her words indicate that she knows the boundaries of proper female behavior and can keep control of her life by remaining a virgin, which she intends to do by “keep[ing] [her] legs together.”¹¹⁰ Moll is aware that she must “close herself off, put her legs together, be secure.”¹¹¹ By keeping her legs together when not playing music, Moll will prevent any type of male violation, ensure her virginity, and secure her financial independence. Moll’s assertions regarding her closed legs parallel Olivia’s self-cloistering in *Twelfth Night*. Olivia’s isolation and Moll’s joined knees allow both women to be secure and safe from male sexual and economic violation in that they place a barrier between the maidens and men who might affront them.

Ultimately, *The Roaring Girl* not only addresses Moll’s virginity, but insists on it. Jean Howard reads this insistence in two possible ways—either as containing the subversion of Moll’s representation by “showing her accepting the central fact of the good woman’s lot” or as an interruption of the discourse that equates mannish, independent women with sexuality.¹¹² However, there is a third option to consider in terms of Moll’s virginity. Sex would interfere with Moll’s role as a businesswoman by decreasing her credibility as a character. Illicit sex would also invite the possibility of male and governmental control over her through the potential of pregnancy, since poor relief was afforded to women who bore children out of wedlock. Staging a sexually

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 4.1.129-131.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 4.1.131.

¹¹¹ Lloyd Edward Kermode, “Destination Doomsday: Desires for Change and Changeable Desires in *The Roaring Girl*,” 440. Kermode states that Moll is hiding sexual desire behind her chastity, which is why she closes herself off from the world. In my view, Moll’s closing off represents a defensive act to prevent violation rather than a self-inhibitive act.

¹¹² Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

active Moll would undermine her financial independence. Therefore, Middleton and Dekker's insistence on Moll's virginity represents celibacy as defensive economic act of female survival that allows Moll to live independently without the interference of a man.

Moll's threat as a financially independent never-married virgin is furthered because, like Olivia, she has no male authority in her life. Moll's lower social class amplifies that threat. Life as a never-married singlewoman was difficult for women from the elite and middling classes in early modern England, but for lower class never-married women life was exceptionally hard. Fear of the independent singlewoman abounded, and "the targets of this fear were often poor, female and young: those people who seemed to threaten a social order run by adult, married males of middling and elite status."¹¹³ The never-married woman's difficulties came from the lack of acceptable employment for singlewomen, a legal system that worked to enforce the established male social order, as well as a negative societal view of never-married women.

In terms of employment, singlewomen who had no familial money or properties at their disposal were required to work in order to maintain themselves. Working for a singlewoman was a double-edged sword, since work that did not involve service within a household was hard to find and socially unacceptable. Moreover, if a woman was lucky enough to find work, it was often temporary. Ultimately, "working singlewomen...lived a precarious life on the economic margins—moving from job to job, eking out a living, and trying to avoid the notice of the authorities."¹¹⁴ Formal trades which might lead to more stable employment were not easy for most singlewomen to break into because they

¹¹³ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 21-22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

“were often organized into male-run guilds and companies in this period.”¹¹⁵ Even if a never-married woman was lucky enough to learn or know a trade, she “enjoyed neither the economic toleration nor the economic assistance extended to working widows;” this is because “in early modern England to be a master or mistress in a trade also meant being a householder,” and, as mentioned earlier, it was not appropriate for a never-married woman to live as an independent householder.¹¹⁶ Poor assistance was readily available to widows, yet in short supply for never-married young women who were considered “able-bodied” or undeserving.¹¹⁷ In short, never-married women were maligned with social and legal stigmas making it next to impossible for them to work independently despite their status as *femme soles*.¹¹⁸

Although never-married women carried the legal title of *femme sole* like widows, for never-married women the legal term was just that—a term. In practice, “urban authorities allowed widows to engage in formal trades but not never-married women.”¹¹⁹ Left with few options other than going into the service of another household and living under male rule, never-married singlewomen without means were in an economically unstable position in early modern England. Some women who chose to live on their own were punished—in Norwich women who lived out of service were incarcerated in Bridewell, a place where the real Moll Cutpurse was incarcerated, and/or thrown out of

¹¹⁵ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁷ Amy M. Froide, “Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England,” 253.

¹¹⁸ A woman is considered a *femme sole* if she is single and has the legal right to own property and enter into contracts on her own.

¹¹⁹ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 28. For legal cases regarding real never-married women and their attempts to engage in business in early modern England see Amy M. Froide’s *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 25-34.

their home towns.¹²⁰ These extreme reactions to women trying to live independently are representative of the anxiety never-married women created in a society where male authority was the norm.

The Roaring Girl and *Twelfth Night* (to a lesser degree) explore these extreme, yet common, reactions to financially independent singlewomen. Olivia in *Twelfth Night* uses her age, social class, and orphan status as a means to appear “widow-like,” which allows Olivia to keep her inherited wealth and maintain the head of her household long enough to marry the man of her choice. Middling and lower class women like Moll Cutpurse and her real-life inspiration Mary Frith, on the other hand, did not enjoy the accommodations Olivia’s character embodies, and were limited in their resources. Even worse, never-married lower class singlewomen who worked and lived in their own lodgings were often elided with prostitutes in early modern England.¹²¹ As Ruth Mazo Karras has skillfully shown: “by the sixteenth century in England, ‘singlewoman’ could be used as a semantic equivalent for ‘prostitute.’”¹²² The common misconception that laboring women were indeed prostitutes, or at least prone to prostitution, added yet another reason why never-married working women aroused anxiety in communities. The legal and social conflation of singlewomen with prostitution was especially problematic for never-married women who headed their own households, like the character of Moll Cutpurse, because the negative association between singlewomen and prostitutes automatically made them suspect to authorities.

¹²⁰ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, 21.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²² Ruth Mazo Karras, “Sex and the Singlewoman,” *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250-1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 131.

The Roaring Girl does directly address the conflation of working women and prostitution. As I have shown, Sir Alexander and Laxton assume Moll is at least promiscuous, if not a prostitute. However, Moll's portrayal conflicts with the openness exhibited by the merchants's wives in the city—they sell wares and exchange money for sex; Moll does not. The merchants's wives are also different from Moll in their designation as wives—as wives they are not heads of the household, at least in a legal sense. Being unmarried and living with no male authority or guardian, Moll is the head of her own household. Though the play does not explicitly state that Moll has her own lodging, given Mary Frith's notoriety, early modern audiences viewing the play would have been aware of Mary Frith's status as head of her own household. Frith's autobiography, published three years after her death, was no doubt sensationalized. Nevertheless, the autobiography does allude to Moll's home several times. Perhaps one of the most threatening things about the real Mary Frith was that her home on Fleet Street (a border area of London's sanctuary), which she leased on her own as head of her household, acted as her storefront as well as her home.¹²³ Frith's autobiography describes her home in detail:

In my house I should have told you, I set up a kind of Brokery or a distinct factory for Jewels, Rings and Watches, which had been pinched or stolen any manner of way, at never so great distances from any person; I might properly enough call it the Insurance Office for such Merchandize, for the Losers were sure upon Composition to recover their Goods again, and the Pirates were as sure to have good ransom, and I so much in

¹²³ John L. McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld 1550-1700* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 60. Moll's antics were notorious around London, as she was a well-known figure in the city. She even sat on the stage during a performance of *The Roaring Girl*.

the Grosse for Brokage without any more danger; the Hue and Cry being always directed to me for the Discovery of the Goods not the Takers.¹²⁴

Moll's occupation in *The Roaring Girl* is the same as her real-life counterpart Mary Frith, but the play never mentions Moll's home or the business she runs from it. Mary Frith's business was a large and thriving one. In fact, "her subordinates were paid higher than the going rate and worked mainly for her."¹²⁵ Although in *The Roaring Girl* we do see Moll conduct business on stage, she never conducts it in her home. She is either in the marketplace or about town. By not showing Moll's business front on stage, Middleton and Dekker remove her from the concerns regarding the home as a marketplace, particularly a sexual marketplace. The nature of business, particularly its exchanges, is exactly what made it inappropriate for early modern Englishwomen. If there was an exchange of money between a man and woman, for goods or services, the exchange was often assumed to be sexual. The play establishes an "intertwined dynamic of commercial practices and private practices," where "...the gallants enter the marketplace to seek sex or consumer goods and must approach the shop space, which is the domain of husband and wife."¹²⁶ Since Moll's business front/home is never shown, Moll and her business are further separated from the sexuality associated with the conflation of home and marketplace.

As a never-married business woman, Moll must manage her money. Moll's ability to manage money is demonstrated in *The Roaring Girl* by her employment of male

¹²⁴ Mary Frith, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith. Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse. Exactly Collected and now Published for the Delight and Recreation of all Merry disposed Persons* (London: the Bible in Giltspur-Street without Newgate, 1662), 43.

¹²⁵ John L McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld 1550-1700*, 113.

¹²⁶ Kelly J. Stage, *The Roaring Girl's London Spaces*, 420.

workers within her business. Trapdoor approaches Moll as a potential employer. He pitches himself to her as, “A poor ebbing gentleman that would gladly wait for the young flood of service.”¹²⁷ Moll goes on to interview Trapdoor, asking him several questions: “My service? What should move you to offer your service to me, sir? ...What pats are there in you for a gentlewoman’s service? ...What strengths have you?” and “Have you the spirit of fighting in you? Durst you second her [your mistress]?”¹²⁸ In these lines Moll questions Trapdoor about his ability to serve her; she must make certain he has the skills to be a good employee. Like all efficient business people, Moll verifies that Trapdoor’s skill set is useful, needed, and a good investment of her money. Later in the play Moll provides for Trapdoor by offering him the suits she wears, but he must prove himself a good employee first.¹²⁹ Even though Trapdoor must demonstrate his worth to receive the clothing, Moll provides some clothes for him in the meantime: “Come, follow me to Saint Thomas Apostles. I’ll put a / livery cloak upon your back, the first thing I do.”¹³⁰ The cloak Moll provides him is a servant’s uniform, which identifies Trapdoor as Moll’s servant, further emphasizing the control Moll has over her money and her authority as a never-married householder who maintains servants.

In addition to spending money on goods and employment, Moll also makes a great deal of money in the play; “interestingly, in the entire play, only Moll is offered money for her services,”¹³¹ whatever those services might be. The labor she performs is

¹²⁷ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 2.1.359-360.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.1.361, 366, 370, 382-83.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.1.196-197.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.1.199-200.

¹³¹ Jo E. Miller, “Women and the Market in *The Roaring Girl*,” *Renaissance et Réforme* 14, no. 1 (1990): 20.

what Mario DiGangi terms “chaste labor.”¹³² DiGangi’s terminology appropriately describes Moll’s work in the play; she labors in order to earn money. Her labor is not sexual, yet it is tied to sexuality—she earns money through Laxton’s sexual liaisons with Mistress Gallipot and acts as a human broker between Sebastian and Mary Fitzallard. *The Roaring Girl* forces audiences to look at “the complex connections between sexuality, gender, and class, between sexual and economic exploitation.”¹³³ As previously mentioned, working class women who did not enter into household service were assumed prostitutes and frequently placed into positions where their only source of income, due to legal and social circumstances, was prostitution. *The Roaring Girl* takes a character who very well could become a prostitute based on her social and legal status and places her in positions where she profits not from sex, but from her virginity.

Not incidentally, the first money Moll earns in *The Roaring Girl* comes from a duel in which Moll defends her honor as well as the honor of other working women, namely prostitutes. Moll is dressed as a man in this scene, yet Laxton recognizes that she is a woman and solicits sex from Moll, offering her ten angels¹³⁴ he just received from Mistress Gallipot in exchange for sex. Moll is insulted by Laxton’s assumption that she is a “hired whore” and challenges him to a duel while adding another ten angels to Laxton’s original offer.¹³⁵ Laxton’s confusion is apparent: “Draw upon a woman? Why,

¹³² Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, 158.

¹³³ Jonathan Dollimore, “Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection,” *Renaissance Drama* 17 (1986): 67.

¹³⁴ Angels are gold coins with the figure of the archangel Michael on them that were used as currency in early modern England. Valerie Foreman, “Marked Angels: Counterfeits, Commodities, and *The Roaring Girl*,” 1548.

¹³⁵ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1.123.

what doest mean, Moll?”¹³⁶ Moll “means” to teach Laxton a lesson on economics, class, and gender by giving him a lecture about the brutal realities of poor singlewomen, all the while continuing to defend her virginity:

In thee I defy all men, their worst hares
And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts
With which they entangle the poor spirits of fools,
Distressed needlewomen and trade-fall’n wives.
Fish that must bite or themselves be bitten,
Such hungry things as these may soon be took
With a worm fast’ned on a golden hook;
Those are the lecher’s food, his prey.¹³⁷

In this passage Moll takes society, and men like Laxton in particular, to task for the conditions in which women live, conditions, Moll asserts, that are no fault of their own. These assertions indicate Moll’s awareness “that money is what women *need* to survive and *not necessarily what they want* from men.”¹³⁸ Given the legal and social limits placed on singlewomen in early modern England, it is not surprising starving women who were unwilling or unable to find work in servitude turned to prostitution for some source of income; they needed money, and male consumers were willing to fill that need in exchange for sex. Moll, “almost alone among the dramatic characters of her day, recognizes that prostitution, professional or improvised, is less often a result of greed and

¹³⁶ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1.72.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.1.93-100.

¹³⁸ Heather Hirschfeld, “What Do Women Know?: *The Roaring Girl* and The Wisdom of Tiresias,” *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 140.

lust than of need and hunger.”¹³⁹ Her critique is an economic and social one that showcases her knowledge of finances.

It is important to note that despite Moll’s defense of these women, she “is *not* among those she describes.”¹⁴⁰ Moll duels Laxton in order to protect and defend her virginity, retaining control of her body: “My spirit shall be mistress of this house / As long as I have time in’t.”¹⁴¹ Moll’s metaphor in this passage is not coincidental. She is the master of her own home while also remaining the mistress of her body, which she speaks of as a home. Moll’s words indicate that she will continue to be the sole mistress of her house/body until she dies and leaves her physical house/body behind. Her interaction with Laxton

demonstrates that a woman can not only engage in violence, but control and direct it for social purposes; she can adopt the male virtue of courage to defend the female virtue of chastity, transforming chaste passivity into active autonomy.¹⁴²

However, she can only do this when she has power, power she gains from her virginity, financial standing, and cross-dressing—a power she seeks to keep through practicing defensive virginity.

Moll defeats Laxton, leaving him begging for mercy: “I do repent me. Hold!”¹⁴³

Laxton goes on to confess the errors of his ways and begs her pardon: “I yield both purse

¹³⁹ Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 255.

¹⁴⁰ Susan E. Krantz, “The Sexual Identity of Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 19, no. 1 (1995): 10.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1.140-141.

¹⁴² Lorraine Helms, “Roaring Girls and Silent Women: the Politics of Androgyny on the Jacobean Stage,” in *Women in Theatre*, ed. James Redmond. *Themes in Drama* 11. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 64.

and body...Spare my life!”¹⁴⁴ Following Laxton’s pleadings, he exits the stage, leaving Moll to lament that if she could meet her “enemies one by one thus / I might make pretty shift with ’em in time.”¹⁴⁵ But Moll cannot confront her enemies, who are consequently enemies of all working women, one by one—the number is just too vast. Perhaps one of the more ironic aspects of the play is Moll’s defeat of Laxton in the scene. His defeat signals that his manhood is in question, while Moll’s victory over him points to her masculinity. At the same time, this scene highlights the social problem of lower class working women. The irony of the entire interchange is that the money Moll wins is money used by women to buy sex. Moll puts down her chaste ten angels, money she has legitimately earned, alongside Mistress Gallipot’s contaminated ten angels, which came from her husband. Laxton’s money is tainted because it comes from Mistress Gallipot, a married woman, who gives Laxton money as a result of their sexual affair. The money Laxton uses to “buy” Moll is the money Mistress Gallipot used to “buy” Laxton. Moll, on the other hand, earns money “by defeating Laxton in a duel that justifies her formal declaration of her sexual honor.”¹⁴⁶ Additionally, Moll’s victory exposes the sexual dishonor of Mistress Gallipot, one of the merchants’s wives who seek to defame her. Moll’s work in the scene is to champion women who are prostitutes, and although Moll acts on the behalf of other, less fortunate singlewomen, the work Moll performs is chaste work that continues to defend her virginity.

¹⁴³ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1. 117,

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 3.1. 123-124.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.1.132-133.

¹⁴⁶ Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, 159.

Moreover, Moll earns money in the play via her agreement with Sebastian. She receives a portion of her payment in act 4, and Sebastian promises to pay her the other forty “[a]t the next quarter, / When I receive the means my father ’lows me.”¹⁴⁷ At this time, Moll is posing as a music teacher to avoid recognition by Sir Alexander. She is dressed as a man, since women were legally not allowed to work in any capacity other than service within a household, yet the monies she receives are not for her services as a musician, but “as a reward for her chaste labors of facilitating the legitimate union of a gentleman and a gentlewoman.”¹⁴⁸ Like Moll’s chaste labor with Laxton, her money is made from the desires of the other characters in the play (Laxton and Mistress Gallipot, Sebastian, and Mary); however, Moll’s work protects her virginity at the same time. In essence, she may profit from the romantic relationships of others, but she does not engage in them—an economic form of defensive virginity.

Moll finds ways around the legal and social constraints placed on women in order to make money and maintain her financial sovereignty through her business. As a result, she does not answer to a man. She controls what she spends and what she buys. This gives Moll an incredible amount of authority, especially when compared to other women in the play. Mary Fitzallard is under the thumb of her father, and the merchants’s wives all get their money from their husbands. They must go through an intermediary in order to purchase goods (or sell them). Moll, on the other hand, can make her own choices because she has her own money. Even though she has free reign to spend her money as she wishes, Moll constrains herself in the area of spending as well; she is in control.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 4.1.164-165.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.1.158-159.

While Jack Dapper buys a feather and Laxton buys tobacco from the merchants, items of luxury, Moll buys practical items—a wool ruff and a pair of pants. Dapper and Laxton have financial problems because they are unable to constrain their spending habits. Moll, on the other hand, does not spend her money frivolously, proving that she has control over the financial aspect of her life in addition to control of her body.

In fact, it is Moll's ability to spend her money as she sees fit that allows her to dress in the manner she does. Certainly, if she were under the control of a man, she would not be allowed to dress in a manly way. Moreover, as Adrienne Eastwood states, Moll's cross-dressing contributes to her purchasing power:

[n]ot only does she dress like a man, but she commands the attention of various merchants and tailors (at the feather shop, the ale house, the tobacco shop) – indicating not only that she has the ability to pay for what she desires, but that her cross dressing enables her to freely patronize businesses and engage in activities such as drinking and smoking that would not have been considered “feminine.”¹⁴⁹

Moll takes on the persona of a man because she is financially stable and does not rely on a man for support. As head of her own household, Moll is the sole purchaser of goods, and her attire reflects that role. Though Moll's cross-dressing is an important component of her authority in the market place, her authority also comes from her ability to pay the merchants whose services and wares she purchases.

Moll Cutpurse has a very different strategy from Olivia for maintaining her financial independence and autonomy. She vows to remain single and never marry. Moll's promises to remain never-married appear frequently in the text. In act 2, scene 2

¹⁴⁹ Adrienne Eastwood, “Controversy and Tragedy in ‘The Maid’s Tale’ and ‘The Roaring Girl,’” 17.

the question of Moll's future and her viability as a potential mate is brought up when Sebastian proposes to her. Moll's response underscores her desire to remain single and in control of her life:

I have no humour to marry, I love
to lie o'both sides of the bed myself; and again, o'th'other
side, a wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear me
I am too headstrong to obey; therefore I'll ne'er go about it.¹⁵⁰

Moll declines Sebastian's proposal on the grounds that she has no intentions of marrying at all. She mentions that she lies on both sides of the bed; a statement that can be (and has been) interpreted in several ways. Moll's statement is most often tied to sexuality in some way, with scholars trying to prove Moll's sexual desires through masturbation, homosexuality, bisexuality, or even atypical heterosexuality. However, there is an alternative reading to this passage. Moll continues her speech with the following words:

I have the head now of myself, and
am man enough for a woman. Marriage is but a chopping
and changing, where a maiden loses one head and has a
worse i'th'place.¹⁵¹

The violence of this passage warrants examination and comment, for it mirrors some of the violent images of violated virginity expressed by Laxton in the previous scene (act 2, scene 1). Moll links not only sex, but also marriage with virginal violence, which she claims is akin to having your head chopped off and then replaced with another, "worse" head. The head Moll talks about is both her maidenhead and her autonomy. As an

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 2.2.37-40.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2.2.43-46.

unmarried, financially independent virgin Moll is able to make her own choices and live her life as she wishes. If she were to marry, Moll would lose her head; she would lose her maidenhead, and her status as the head of her household. This change would, in turn, remove all of her power and autonomy, and that is a risk she is unwilling to take.

In the final act of the play Moll's intentions to remain single are questioned once again, and Moll's response is much the same. When asked when she will marry (not *if*), Moll states:

I'll tell you when, i'faith:
 When you shall hear
 Gallants void from sergeants' fear,
 Honesty and truth unslandered,
 Woman manned but never pandered,
 Cheaters booted but not coached,
 Vessels older ere they're broached.
 If my mind be then not varied,
 Next day following, I'll be married.¹⁵²

In the words of Lord Noland, "That sounds like doomsday."¹⁵³ Moll's requirements will never be met, and all of her requirements are based on social changes, changes that are not realistic in early modern England. This passage, with its references to theft, slander, and cheating continues to place Moll on the outskirts of society. She may be an advocate for women and one of the two virgins in the play (Mary Fitzallard is the other), but she resolutely refuses marriage, and with that refusal, "she assumes the psychological freedom of the traditional disguised heroine without providing the corresponding

¹⁵² Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, 5.2.222-229

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.2.230.

reassurance implicit in that heroine's eventual erotic transformation."¹⁵⁴ She cannot be transformed from never-married singlewoman to wife. Nonetheless, the audience is "invited to condone" Middleton and Dekker, suggesting that Moll's choice to remain single may be the most rational choice of all, since all the marriages shown in the play are troubled—women looking for sex from men who are not their husbands, husbands who are cuckolds or buy sex from prostitutes, and wives who control their husbands.¹⁵⁵ Moll's defensive virginity looks more stable, despite the strangeness of her appearance and her status as a never-married businesswoman, than any of the marriages in the play, casting a positive light on Moll's character.

Regardless of Moll's personal beliefs and the negative light that marriage is cast in *The Roaring Girl*, marriage is still the concluding force in the play due to the upcoming nuptials between Sebastian and Mary. Although Moll defends her virginity and refuses to become a wife herself, she does not try to change the economic or social systems that are already in place for anyone else. It is only with Moll's assistance that Mary and Sebastian are finally married, and Moll willingly and knowingly helps them. She does not begrudge other women's marriages; she just does not want to be married herself. Moll understands consumerism and the intricacies of the marketplace. She knows it is only through her status as a financially independent virgin that she is able to keep her freedom. If she married or lost her virginity, she would also lose her financial autonomy, and for Moll autonomy is very important. Moll's choice to keep her legs shut

¹⁵⁴ Mary Beth Rose, "Women in Men's Clothing: Apparel and Social Stability in *The Roaring Girl*," 389.

¹⁵⁵ Viviana Comensoli, "Play-making, Domestic Conduct, and the Multiple Plot in *The Roaring Girl*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1800* 27, no. 2 (1987): 251.

makes her less of a roaring girl than the other women in the play, with the exception of Mary. Rosamond and Prudence are scolders who open their mouths, and possibly even their legs, without constraint. Money and sexual desire controls their lives, while Moll takes charge of every aspect of her life, and “though she is committed to a single life, it is, she assures us, a life of chastity – she is, indeed, with the exception of Mary Fitzallard, the only unquestionably virtuous woman in the play.”¹⁵⁶ *The Roaring Girl* leads the audience to appreciate Moll’s position on marriage and understand, at least in Moll’s case, the life of a successful fiscally solvent never-married woman is a result of her defensive virginity.

Moll and Olivia operate as independent householders in *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl* respectively. Both women control their houses, pay and command their servants, spend and save their money, and (perhaps most importantly) demonstrate an acute awareness of the position of women within the economic social structures of early modern England and the threat sexual relations present to never-married singlewomen. While Olivia and Moll mutually begin the plays as virgins, by the end there is a distinct difference between them: Olivia marries while Moll proclaims her intentions to remain single throughout her life. Moll’s complete rejection of marriage makes her a more subversive character, something the characters in *The Roaring Girl* highlight by associating her with monstrosity and unnaturalness. Regardless of each woman’s choice, the motivation is the same—economic independence.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*, 152.

Though Olivia and Moll are at first glance very different characters, these women share some very important characteristics. They are fiscally solvent virgins who actively try to maintain their economic autonomy. Olivia maintains control over her life and finances by controlling her household, protecting her inheritance from the uncle that stands as an ever present threat to her estate, and finding a marriage partner who is her junior in age, as well as inferior to her in wealth and class. Moll, like Olivia, controls her household, but she also conducts business, hires and pays employees, earns money and spends it as she sees fit, ultimately rejecting marriage outright. Both plays in the end show the triumph of a conventional union—between Olivia and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and Mary and Sebastian in *The Roaring Girl*—because these singlewomen represent a threat to social order and draw attention to early modern cultural anxieties about female control over households and purse strings. Neither play can allow Olivia or Moll to succeed completely. Olivia's success is hampered by her marriage, while Moll's success is dampened by her position as a social outlier. These texts explore, with very different outcomes, the cultural complexities fiscally solvent never-married singlewomen posed in Renaissance England. But like many of the other works examined in this study, *Twelfth Night* and *The Roaring Girl* reject life-long virginity by either marrying off the virgin (Olivia) or depicting her as a social deviant (Moll) in order to privilege marriage as the as the best and only acceptable state for women.

CHAPTER IV

MILTON'S *LUDLOW MASKE*: WHERE DEFENSIVE VIRGINITY, THE POLITICAL,
AND THE PHILOSOPHIC MEET

Milton's *Ludlow Maske*, by virtue of its genre and content, encompasses many of the elements discussed in early chapters. Spenser and Shakespeare are known sources for Milton, so it is not surprising that his textual exploration of the complexities of gender and virginity incorporates issues from both writers, while adding some of his own. In the *Ludlow Maske* we see Milton revise and rework themes from the texts discussed in earlier chapters—the virgin wandering alone and endangered in the woods, the spiritual and physical implications of virginity, and the politics and legalities that surround issues of virginity and virtue.¹ But while the content of the *Ludlow Maske* follows the lead, in many ways, of Milton's predecessors, the form and genre of this work allows him to reflect on the political and historical contexts of his text more directly. The masque was written to commemorate the installation of the Earl of Bridgewater, and the main players in the show were part of the Earl's household, blurring the line between fiction and non-fiction more than if the piece were a poem or play. Yet because the masque is fiction, it allows Milton to critique the Caroline court's use of Platonism in court masques and to

¹ It is clear from the various manuscripts of *Comus* that Milton went through several revisions of the masque. The 1637 and 1645 published versions are very similar, but Henry Lawes had the manuscript printed in 1637. I use Roy Flannagan's edition based on the 1645 text because the 1637 publication has more flattery of the Earl's family than the 1645 version, which Milton had printed independently. As Flannagan notes, "[t]he movement from the two manuscript versions to the two printed versions...is from 'aristocratic entertainment' to intellectual achievement, the masque as an occasional dramatic piece and the masque as a poetic achievement on its own." Roy Flannagan, introduction to *Comus*, by John Milton in *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 116.

praise virginity as a superior spiritual state. That Milton had a specific message to convey through the masque regarding virginity is evident from the revisions he made to the text prior to its publication in 1637.² Milton's *Ludlow Maske* further engages the audience by critiquing two things: the Caroline court's misuse of Platonic philosophy and the potential consequences of inept male guardianship. However, within these critiques Milton's praise for virginity and its defensive powers emerges as the most defining aspect of the masque.

The drama examines two philosophies regarding sexuality. One, based on the Caroline court's Platonic cult, emphasizes the naturalness of sex and associates sexuality with fertility and reproduction. There is a sense that spiritual ascension comes from unity with a lover; Milton presents this type of sexuality as lustful and debased. The other philosophy, Neo-Platonism,³ which Milton endorses, presents virginity as a higher spiritual state that allows the virgin to attain a closer spiritual relationship with the divine within. The storyline of Carolinian masques depicted Platonic spiritual ascension as a model for the audience,⁴ but Milton's Lady has already ascended to a higher spiritual plane through her virginity before she is seen by the audience. The masque demonstrates

² At Cambridge Milton was known for his chastity, which he felt was necessary for gaining the powers of a bard; Milton's good looks and pride in his purity earned him the nickname of "the Lady of Christ's." Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), 12.

³ I am differentiating Milton's Platonic philosophy from that of the Caroline court by labeling his philosophy as "Neo-Platonic." The difference in these two schools of thought is in the Cabbalistic influences within Neo-Platonism, and it is this form of Platonism that Milton seems to be invoking in the masque. For a detailed discussion on Neo-Platonism in the Elizabethan era and slightly beyond (Yates's study does include Milton), see Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), esp. 206-212.

⁴ Sears Jayne, "The Subject of Milton's *Ludlow Mask*," in *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus*, ed. John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 167.

that she derives power from her heightened spiritual state, which Milton suggests is reliant upon her virginity.

There have been some studies that have correlated Milton with Platonism in the past, but there has been no recent work on Platonism in the *Ludlow Maske*.⁵ The most notable of these earlier studies are “The Argument of Milton’s *Comus*” by A. S. P. Woodhouse, a study that addresses the issue of spiritual ascent in the masque; Sears Jayne’s essay “The Subject of Milton’s *Ludlow Mask*,” which highlights the influences of Ficino’s Platonism on Milton, and G. F. Sensabaugh’s “The Milieu of *Comus*,” a study that explores the relationship of the Platonic cult of the Caroline court to Milton’s masque.⁶ More recently, A. E. Dyson has shown “[t]he predetermining influence upon Milton’s earlier ideas was Neo-Platonism” by using examples from Milton’s early work, including “Il Penseroso” and “L’Allegro,” as justifications of Milton’s early experiments with Neo-Platonism.⁷ My work differs from these earlier studies on Platonism in the *Ludlow Maske* by clearly distinguishing between the Platonism of the Caroline court, which Milton appears to take issue with, and the esoteric Neo-Platonism Milton advocates.⁸ This difference hinges on the fact that the Lady’s spiritual ascension has

⁵ The latest date of studies on Milton’s masque and its relationship to Platonism is 1970.

⁶ Sears Jayne, “The Subject of Milton’s *Ludlow Maske*” in *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton’s Comus*, 165-187; George F. Sensabaugh, “The Milieu of *Comus*,” in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, The Early Poems, ed. J. Martin Evans (New York: Routledge, 2003); A. S. P. Woodhouse, “The Argument of Milton’s *Comus*,” in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, The Early Poems, ed. J. Martin Evans (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁷ A. E. Dyson, “The Interpretation of *Comus*,” in *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton’s Comus*, ed. John D. Diekhoff (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1998), 104. For a study that examines *Paradise Lost* and its Platonic influences, see Clay Daniel, “Milton’s Neo-Platonic Angel?” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 1 (2004): 173-188.

⁸ That Milton would have been familiar with Cabbalistic forms of Platonic philosophy through philosophers such as Cornelius Agrippa and Robert Fludd has been well documented. See Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker*, 301-309; Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 208;

already occurred; what the audience witnesses is her firm adherence to virginity, an act of defensive virginity that is seated within the individual consciousness.

In Neo-Platonic philosophy, there are three different worlds or levels of existence. The lowest world, the Elemental world, is grounded in the body and physical senses. The Intellectual world is a lower celestial realm. The celestial realm in the Intellectual world is about the soul and its connection with the divinity inside the seeker. The highest level of ascension occurs in the world called Mens. This level is almost unattainable by humanity because rather than accessing the divine within, it requires becoming one with God in soul. Underlying this philosophy is the concept that the divine, God, is everywhere, including inside each of us: Neo-Platonic philosophers believed that in transcending the Elemental world by keeping the body pure, one could access the divinity residing within the soul. In the *Ludlow Maske*, the Lady's power reflects this idea. She is a virgin, and through that state she has ascended into the Intellectual world, making her capable of fending off Comus's advances by accessing the power of the divinity within her spirit. The power of her virginity, like that of Abigail and Isabella, is tied to spirituality. However, the Lady's spiritual authority is deeply esoteric and internalized. She has no need for a convent; her power comes from the divine residing within her. This power, which is seated within the individual, allows the Lady to defend her virginity using her strength alone. The Lady's strength comes from the purity of her body and mind; she has ascended on the Neo-Platonic ladder of spiritual development and is

R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Milton and the *Conjectura Cabbalistica*," *Journal of Warburg Courtauld Institutes* 18, no. 1/2 (1955): 90-113; Merritt Y. Hughes, "Milton and the Symbol of Light," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 4, no. 1 (1964): 1-33; Robert H. West, "Milton's Angelological Heresies," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4, no. 1 (1953): 116-123.

immune to bestial desires of the flesh before her encounter with Comus. Her rejection of Comus is not just a rejection of sex, but a continued rejection of a life that is grounded in the Elemental world in favor of a more spiritual life in the Intellectual world.

In 1634 virginity was still an avenue of cultural concern as writers continued to imagine where virginity might fit into society, and this is evident in Milton's masque. But what is additionally important about the *Ludlow Maske*, in contrast to the other works in my study, is its direct relationship to specific historical events. These historical events provide the backdrop for Milton's critique of the Caroline court's Platonic cult, but they also lay the foundations for a critique of inadequate male guardianship. The Lady is capable of thwarting Comus's seduction (given that the Lady was played by a young aristocrat whose father commissioned the piece, to stage anything otherwise would have been indecorous), yet the masque suggests she should not have been put in a position that would make her susceptible to Comus in the first place. The Lady is put in that position by her younger brothers, the eldest of which will inherit his father's title and role as head of the household. Milton emphasizes her brothers's transgression to show the potential consequences of inadequate male guardianship, a symptom of inadequate household management.

In the seventeenth century, maintaining an orderly household was important for aristocrats, since the management of their households was believed to reflect their competence in governance. For the Egerton family, the family for whom the masque was written, this topic was perhaps all too familiar, given the circumstances surrounding the

masque and its performance.⁹ Additionally, the masque form, by its nature, demands engagement with the social, political, religious and economic milieus in which the work is created. Masques were a popular pastime in Charles's court, and courtiers took part in the performances; they were written for particular occasions and people. Since masques were written for special occasions, once a masque was performed, it was highly unlikely to be restaged.¹⁰ Furthermore, the aristocratic commissioning and financing of masques meant they typically presented a storyline in which the power of the monarch was emphasized. By the time the *Ludlow Maske* was written, masques had been performed as courtly entertainment in England for quite some time. Milton was commissioned by Lord Bridgewater, John Egerton—an arrangement likely facilitated by Henry Lawes, music teacher to the Bridgewater children and friend to Milton—to write the masque for a performance at Ludlow Castle. Lord Bridgewater and his family were on progress from London to their new home at Ludlow Castle, Lord Bridgewater having been very recently confirmed to his post as Lord Lieutenant of Wales.

Although there is no question that Egerton commissioned the *Ludlow Maske*, there does seem to be some debate between scholars about the occasion of the masque. Stephen Orgel argues that the date of the masque, Michaelmas Night, September 29, 1634, is the occasion of the performance. Orgel goes on to suggest that Lord Bridgewater had already taken his post as Lord Lieutenant in 1631, and the masque was a

⁹ The most important and well-known historical studies of the masque are Barbara Breasted's article "Comus and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies* 3 (1971): 201-224 and Leah Marcus's work on the Earl of Bridgewater in "The Earl of Bridgewater's Legal Life: Notes Towards a Political Reading of *Comus*," in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, The Early Poems, ed. J. Martin Evans, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 297-308.

¹⁰ Angus Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton's Comus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 6.

family affair rather than a state affair.¹¹ Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk clears up the problem of the occasion that inspired the masque by noting that while Egerton was nominated Lord President in 1631, he “did not receive preferment until 1634, largely because of a scandal involving his family.”¹² Moreover, the text does allude to the occasion of the masque as a political event, for it begins and ends by referencing the state. At the start of the performance, the Attendant Spirit flatters Lord Bridgewater and comments upon his arrival at Ludlow:

A noble Peer of mickle trust, and power
Has in his charge, with temper'd awe to guide
An old, and haughty Nation proud in Arms:
Where his fair off-spring nurs't in Princely lore,
Are coming to attend their Father's state,
And new-entrusted Scepter...¹³

These lines clearly identify Egerton as the new leader of Wales, a “Nation proud in Arms.” The association of his children (who were players in the masque) with “Princely lore” indicates the high social standing of the family, as well as their relationship to the crown. The children, the Attendant Spirit tells the audience, are coming to see their

¹¹ Orgel does acknowledge that the masque includes references that corroborate it as a state occasion, but holds fast to his contention that it is not a piece celebrating Lord Bridgewater's installation. Stephen Orgel, “The Case for Comus,” *Representations* 81 (2003): 32-33.

¹² Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk, “Dark Scandal and the Sun-Clad Power of Chastity: The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15, no. 1 (1975): 142. John Creaser argues that Bridgewater assumed some duties of his post during the time of the scandal and the delay was related to weddings within the family rather than the scandal, but it seems difficult to conceive that the scandal had no part at all in the delay. John Creaser, “Milton's *Comus*: The Irrelevance of the Castlehaven Scandal,” *Milton Quarterly* 21 no. 4 (1987): 25-34.

¹³ John Milton, *A Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 31-36. All further references to the *Ludlow Maske* are taken from the Flannagan edition unless otherwise noted.

father in his new state. That new “state” includes a Scepter, which symbolizes Lord Bridgewater’s new role as Lord President of Wales.

In case the audience may have forgotten the occasion of the masque, the Attendant Sprit reminds them of it at the conclusion of the performance, when the children are safely back on the path to their father’s home:

Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is you Fathers residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate
His wish’t presence...¹⁴

Certainly the Spirit’s reference to the “state” is not coincidental, given the surrounding circumstances and Egerton’s recent confirmation to his new post. This passage also refers to the audience, as the Spirit explains that “many a friend” is present at the performance to congratulate Lord Bridgewater. The mention of “many friends” does appear to refute Orgel’s position that the performance of the *Ludlow Maske* was confined to family. Since Bridgewater and Lawes are thought to have had input on the performance of the masque, if the audience were comprised of family only, it would make more sense to acknowledge the audience as family. Moreover, the modifier “many” infers that the audience was not small in size. The Attendant Spirit’s lines also reference the much anticipated but delayed arrival of Bridgewater—“His wish’t presence”—which alludes to the lapse in time between the Earl’s appointment in 1631 and his later preferment. This evidence, both textual and historic in nature, confirms the

¹⁴ John Milton, *A Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 945-950.

occasion of the masque as a public celebration of Egerton's new post—a celebration of state. As a high ranking official of the court, it was essential for Bridgewater to demonstrate his ability to govern his household as an example of his ability to govern the people of Wales, and the *Ludlow Maske*, a masque staged to celebrate his installation, hints that this may be a challenge for him.

Though the *Ludlow Maske* was written as a celebratory work, a few clouds hung over the occasion that influenced the masque's content. One of those clouds was the horrific past of the Egerton family, which Barbara Breasted has brought to light.¹⁵ The scandal involved the Countess of Bridgewater's sister (Anne Touchet) and Anne's daughter, Elizabeth Audley. Anne, having been widowed, remarried Mervin Touchet (Lord Audley and Earl of Castlehaven) and brought her daughter by her first husband, Elizabeth, to live with her new husband. Touchet married his step-daughter Elizabeth, who was eleven or twelve years old at the time, to his son James. In 1631, when James came of age, he brought unspeakable charges against his father. Touchet was accused of practicing sodomy with two of his servants, as well as facilitating and watching servants rape his wife and step-daughter. Antill, one of the men accused of raping the ladies and a former servant of Touchet's, was married to one of Touchet's daughters, and it is believed that James brought the grisly charges against his father in fear that he was going to be disinherited in favor of Antill.¹⁶ Touchet and two of his servants were convicted and sentenced to death for their crimes. Despite the fact that Anne and Elizabeth had

¹⁵ For a very detailed discussion of the scandal, see Barbara Breasted, "The Castlehaven Sandal" and Cynthia Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ William B. Hunter, Jr., *Milton's Comus: Family Piece* (Troy, NY: The Thitson Publishing Company, 1983), 25.

been through a terrible experience, Alice, the Countess Dowager of Derby,¹⁷ mother-in-law to Lord Bridgewater, would not accept the women back into her home until they were formally exonerated by the King.

One of the things adding to the incredible nature of the scandal was Touchet's aristocratic status: if the household is a little kingship, as was believed in early modern England, then "an aristocratic household that failed as dramatically as did the one at Fonthill Giford [the home of Touchet] endangered its inhabitants and the broader logic of analogical didacticism."¹⁸ Based on the king/household analogy, Touchet was not only guilty of heinous crimes, but the crimes were even more shocking because as head of the house, he should have been the protector of its inhabitants, not the person instigating and participating in the violence. Touchet exemplified misrule; there was no order in his home, and *he* was the cause of it. The protector of the household in this case was indeed its violator as well. The scandal was "one of the most outrageous sexual scandals of the early seventeenth century," and was likely to have not been forgotten three short years later when Egerton became Lord President of Wales.¹⁹

However, the amount of influence the scandal exerted over Milton's *Ludlow Maske* is a matter of critical contention. Barbara Breasted asserts that the scandal played a significant role in the masque's creation and performance: "this scandal provided a context for *Comus* that may have influenced the way the masque was written, the way it was cut for performance, and the way it was received by its first audiences in 1634."²⁰

¹⁷ Interestingly, Milton's masque *Arcades* was performed in the Countess's honor around 1632.

¹⁸ Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder*, 73.

¹⁹ Barbara Breasted, "Comus and the Castlehaven Scandal," 202.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

Breasted goes on to argue that the main impetus for the masque was the affirmation of virtue within the Egerton family. She also claims cuts in the performance manuscript were made because they might have evoked uncomfortable feelings in the Egerton family by recalling the scandal. On the other side of the debate is John Creaser, who denies that the scandal had much, if any, influence on the *Ludlow Maske*. Creaser argues against Breasted's contention that the cuts and changes in the masque were a direct result of the scandal on the premise that given the multitude of possible rationales for the script changes, it is impossible to pin down one reason for the revisions in the performance manuscript. Alas, without some compelling evidence from the author himself, explaining the alterations seems near impossible. Between the extreme positions presented by Breasted and Creaser, there is a middle path. The Castlehaven scandal was very well-known and copiously documented,²¹ so the events surrounding Touchet had some influence on the masque.²² This influence surfaces in the text as a commentary on the implications of poor male guardianship, as the brothers leave their vulnerable sister in the woods, and they are ultimately unable to save her on their own.

Another scandal associated with John Egerton's name was the Margery Evans rape case, which Leah Marcus's skillful investigation brought to light. Marcus relays that on Midsummer's eve in 1631 Margery Evans, "an illiterate fourteen-year old servant,"

²¹ Nancy Weitz Miller has an excellent discussion of the public texts about the scandal in "Chastity, Rape, and Ideology in the Castlehaven Testimonies and Milton's *Ludlow Masque*" *Milton Studies* 32 (1995): 153-68.

²² Julie Kim shares my interpretation that the scandals are "not irrelevant" even if the parallels between the masque and scandal are not intentional; Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk makes a similar observation as well. Julie Kim, "The Lady's Unladylike Struggle," *Milton Studies* 35 (1997): 4, and Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk, "Dark Scandal and The Sun-Clad Power of Chastity: The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*," 144.

was “accosted as she walked alone by the roadside in Herefordshire near the Welsh boarder...by one Philbert Burghill and his man.”²³ The girl was robbed, raped, and threatened with death if she told anyone about what happened that evening.²⁴ Evans was poor and uneducated, but she wanted justice. She appealed to Charles I in a letter written by her aunt, and the Earl of Bridgewater (Egerton) was given the case. Egerton went about investigating the case with fairness even though Burghill, the alleged assailant, was a gentleman with connections. Lord Bridgewater failed to get a conviction in court, but settled the matter in his private chambers in 1634. Marcus points out that she has no direct evidence that Milton knew of Margery Evans, save the parallels between the *Ludlow Maske* and the case, but she argues that those parallels prove Milton saw Egerton as a moderate when set against the inflexible Archbishop Laud, whose church jurisdiction overlapped with the Lord’s secular one.²⁵ Marcus’s argument highlights the intimate connections between the masque and politics, but I would like to focus on the implications of the case as it relates to the rape of an unguarded young lady, for this issue is one Milton takes up in the masque in order to point out the necessity of competent male guardianship.

The Castlehaven Scandal and the Margery Evans case, along with the occasion of the masque, establish historical contexts that are significant to interpretations of the *Ludlow Maske* because they highlight the importance of male guardianship and the potential for female violation when it is not available. Although the Lady is able to

²³ Leah Marcus, “The Earl of Bridgewater’s Legal Life: Notes Toward A Political Reading of *Comus*,” 302.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

²⁵ Marcus goes as far as to claim “*Comus* is an anti-Laudian masque,” in which Milton praises the autonomy and moderate spirit of Lord Bridgewater. *Ibid.*, 298.

defend herself against Comus, her brothers's actions are what lead to her duress. In this way, the brothers represent inadequate male guardianship. The plot of the *Ludlow Maske*—a young woman is abandoned by inept guardians, threatened with rape, then rescued and returned to her home—has too many parallels with the legal cases tied to the Bridgewater family to be dismissed as coincidental. Furthermore, the state occasion and Lord Bridgewater's position as Lord Lieutenant of Wales code Milton's critiques of inept male guardianship and the Platonic cult of the Caroline court as political.

The history surrounding the masque and the family it honors, though intriguing, is only part of what makes the *Ludlow Maske* such a complex work. Milton had no choice regarding the genre of the piece he wrote for the Ludlow castle celebration. William R. Parker, a Milton biographer, explains: "nothing else that [Milton] ever wrote was so thoroughly influenced by the wishes of others and by external circumstances. It was limited from the outset by practical considerations utterly beyond his control."²⁶ Since the work was commissioned and the masque genre set upon Milton by Bridgewater, that Milton was able to infuse political critiques within the piece is a testament to his skill. Anything thought inappropriate or unappealing could have been altered or deleted during rehearsals of the masque at the request of the commissioner rather than Milton. William B. Hunter rightly points out that Lawes's introductory letter addressed to "John Lord Vicount Bracly, Son and Heir Apparent to the Earl of Bridgewater" in the 1637 published version of the masque acknowledges the Egerton family's active participation in the content of the work, for Lawes writes that the *Ludlow Maske* had "reciev'd its first

²⁶ William R. Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), 128.

occasion of Birth from your Self, and *others of your Noble Family*” (emphasis mine).²⁷

Lawes’s words indicate that indeed the family did have some hand in the content of the masque and were involved in the creative process in collaboration with Milton, yet the extent of their involvement is unclear.

Although Milton was confined by the conditions surrounding the commissioning of the masque, he chose not to adhere to all the formalities of the masque genre. This appears to be an intentional rhetorical move designed to allow Milton to push against the conventions of the masque as it was performed in the Caroline court. There are several proposed reasons for Milton’s rejection of masque conventions. The most overt refutation of the masque genre is the content of the *Ludlow Maske*, which does not work to emphasize royal power or assume the typical parallel between masque and actual court life. Typical masques staged at the Caroline court featured a Platonic journey, and ended with the royal couple as a model of ideal love, a model all spectators should strive to attain.²⁸ Angus Fletcher observes,

[t]here is much less sense of regal or princely power in *Comus* than any masque of comparable stature, and this is the result of nascent Miltonic libertarianism, which will not permit the act, the process, the dramaturgy of masking to assimilate all individual differences into the oneness of princely passion.”²⁹

²⁷ John Milton, *A Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 120. The connection between the letter and masque’s conception is noted by William B. Hunter, *Milton’s Comus: Family Piece*, 4. Although Lawes speaks of the masque’s creative process as collaborative, the published manuscript had two important and significant additions that did not appear in the Trinity or Bridgewater Manuscripts.

²⁸ Masques that follow this trajectory include *Coelum Britannicum* and *Tempe Restored*. Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton’s Puritan Masque* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), 74-75.

²⁹ Angus Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton’s Comus*, 18.

Fletcher's emphasis on the individual is accurate, and it is the focus on the individual that differentiates Milton's Neo-Platonism from the Platonism of the court. Milton's Lady also goes on a journey, but during her journey she must use the divinity within to defend herself against Comus's fleshly temptations, a feat she is only able to accomplish because of her virginity.³⁰ The Lady's power is located within the individual, whereas Caroline masques usually located power within earthly love and the monarch.

Milton's alterations in the typical masque plot of the period are not the only way he defies masque conventions. In traditional court masques, the masquers were silent. Those who spoke in the performance were typically hired players from outside the court, "particularly in the carnival uproar of the anti-masque, while courtly masquers silently moved through a different aesthetic and mythic space, beyond the fury and the folly of social strife."³¹ But the masquers in the *Ludlow Maske* were not silent or hired players—the main masquers were the Egerton children. Alice, age fifteen, played the Lady; the brothers were played by Thomas Egerton (age nine) and John Egerton (age eleven).³² The children not only spoke during the performance, but the fulcrum of the plot turns on Alice Egerton's character, the Lady, who does not remain silent, but fights against Comus in order to preserve her virginity. The characters of the masque take on their assigned roles, yet those roles mirror the Egerton children's stations in life as youngsters, siblings,

³⁰ Other critics have given additional possibilities for Milton's defiance of masque conventions. Maryann Cale McGuire attributes Milton's non-compliance with the Royalist masque form to his emerging Puritanism sympathies, while William Schullenburger views that masque as a work that focuses on a girl's journey into adulthood which displays the power of the chaste conscience and Puritan self. Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton's Puritan Masque*, 5 and William Schullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's Comus as Initiation* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 47.

³¹ William Shcullenbuger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's Comus as Initiation*, 59.

³² Henry Lawes, the children's music teacher took on the role of Thyrsis, the Attendant Spirit. It is not clear who took on the role of Sabrina, though it is assumed an outside player performed the role of the villain, Comus.

and heirs of the Egerton family dynasty and history. Thus, the lines between fiction, reality, and the historical context of the masque become inexorably intertwined, for the young Alice Egerton performs and vocalizes a defense of virginity in response to an attempted seduction and rape, mirroring the events of the Castlehaven scandal and Margery Evans case. Even if the Egertons did not intend the masque to actively engage in a discourse about these events, it seems implausible that the parallels between them would not be noticeable to audience members who knew the family or the wider audience of readers who read the published versions. Milton uses these parallels to convey criticisms of inept male guardianship—a contributing factor in the demise and attempted demise of unguarded young women in the masque, the Castlehaven scandal, and the Margery Evans case—as well as the Platonism of the Caroline court’s masque.

That virtue in general, and chastity in particular, was a topic for the masque was not unusual (though in the case of the Egerton family it was especially apropos), as chastity was a common theme in court masques of the time. However, Milton’s intermingling of the terms “virginity” and “chastity” seems to indicate there is little or no differentiation in their meanings within the *Ludlow Maske*.³³ Ronald Corthell, working from the 1645 Flannagan edition of the masque, counts eleven uses of the terms “chaste” or “chastity” and eleven occurrences of the word “virgin” or “virginity.” From this information Corthell concludes that while there are stylistic reasons why Milton might

³³ My opinion on this is shared by Robert Martin Adams, “Reading *Comus*,” in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, The Early Poems, ed. J. Martin Evans (New York: Routledge, 2003), 271.

chose one word over the other in some instances, it is a complicated matter to sort out the grounds for every use.³⁴ A. E. Dyson argues that at this early stage in Milton's work

he regarded Virginity as superior to marriage, both because it is more in keeping with the Platonic view of Virtue, and because it is an aspiration more capable of inspiring and sustaining a white-heat of idealistic fervor that is its humdrum and widely practiced alternative.³⁵

Dyson is correct in pointing out that virginity is privileged in Neo-Platonic thought, but his observation does little to explain Milton's interchanging of the words "virginity" and "chastity," especially since "chastity" has a broader meaning (it can refer to one who has had sex) than "virginity." William Shullenberger offers another explanation: "the textual coordination of chastity and virginity which vexes Milton's critics is not a disjuncture but a continuity. She [the Lady] cannot defend her virginity as a physical condition without defining and depending on chastity as an ethical condition."³⁶ Shullenberger is onto something here because one can be a chaste virgin, but to be chaste does not require one to be a virgin. Additionally, the phrase "chaste virgin" implies a higher ethical condition than chastity alone; to intertwine the two terms and use them contextually elevates the ethical and moral fortitude of the Lady within the masque.

This issue is, I think, complicated by the occasional nature of the text, which is often overlooked in critical debates about Milton's word choice. Alice Egerton was a young aristocratic lady of marriageable age, so to praise virginity solely would have been an awkward decision for Milton (if, indeed, Milton was given a choice about it). As a

³⁴ Ronald Corthell, "Go Ask Alice: Daughter, Patron, and Poet in *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*," *Milton Studies* 44 (2005): 119.

³⁵ A. E. Dyson, "The Interpretation of *Comus*," 123.

³⁶ William Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's Comus as Initiation*, 181.

matter of decorum, praising chastity, while making it interchangeable with virginity, was a safer, more acceptable approach for highlighting Alice Egerton's virtue because using "chastity" in concert with "virginity" does not negate Lady Alice's future role as wife. This is a pattern we have seen before, namely in Spenser's *Britomart*, the Knight of Chastity who was both virginal and chaste. However, Milton does not seem to readily accept chastity as a state equal to virginity. As a result of the tensions between a commissioned work and personal beliefs, the superiority of virginity runs as an undercurrent throughout the *Ludlow Maske*.

Though chastity was not foreign to Caroline court masques, Milton's treatment of the concept does not work like most other masques of the period, which promoted the royal marriage as a model of marital bliss while reinforcing kingly power.³⁷ Queen Henrietta Maria brought to Charles's court the reinterpretation of Platonic philosophy, and Caroline masques reflected the Platonic court culture she promoted. The Queen "aroused Puritan ire by promoting a coterie of platonic love, whose rites and beliefs ran athwart religious tradition."³⁸ The tenants of the coterie are concisely summarized by George Sensabaugh:

1. Beauty and goodness are one and the same.
2. Beautiful women command worship.
3. Love for beautiful women is chaste and pure.

³⁷ Christopher Kendrick, "Milton and Sexuality: A Symptomatic Reading of *Comus*," in *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York: Methuen, 1987), 47. Kendrick goes on to argue that the masque is "anti-Caroline" and "anti-Anglican."

³⁸ George F. Sensabaugh, "The Milieu of *Comus*," in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, *The Early Poems*, ed. J. Martin Evans (New York: Routledge, 2003), 239.

4. Such love is divine and all-powerful.³⁹

Sensabaugh goes on to state that this type of love “encouraged courtiers to pursue carnal love, which they [the court] proceeded to sanction with rhetorical jargon.”⁴⁰ This portrayal of Platonic philosophy does not follow its Elizabethan Neo-Platonic predecessors in abstracting man (and woman) from bestial love, and places the Platonism of the Caroline court firmly in the Elemental world. Ending masques with a promotion of bestial love as the aim of spiritual ascension, as the court’s masques typically did, presents the highest level of spiritual ascension as occurring within the lowest world, the Elemental world, which completely contradicts Neo-Platonic notions of spiritual ascension.

Moreover, the Caroline court parlayed Platonic love into the theory of divine right, where the monarch mediates between the binaries of Ideal Forms and earthly appearances: “A monarch mediates between extremes, since, according to the traditional doctrine of the king’s two bodies, the monarch is at once timeless and temporal; further, according to men, bringing together heaven and earth in his [the king’s] very person.”⁴¹ Milton rejects both of these ideas. The concept of king as spiritual mediator, which was central to the Caroline court’s Platonic masques, goes against Neo-Platonic philosophy by placing power beyond the individual, as a touchstone of Neo-Platonism is the individual’s spiritual journey and development, which is something that must be

³⁹ George F. Sensabaugh, “The Milieu of *Comus*,” 240.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 240. Maryann Cale McGuire echoes Sensabaugh’s sentiments about Milton’s reaction to the Caroline court: “Milton himself, convinced that Charles’s theater encourages sexual Neo-Platonic spirituality as hypocritical,” (135). However, I would clarify that Milton likely felt the court’s version of Neo-Platonism was a sham rather than the philosophy itself.

⁴¹ Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton’s Puritan Masque*, 75.

undertaken alone. If love is divine in the Platonic sense, it cannot be bestial or carnal love, like that of Comus.⁴² Bestial love resides within the Elemental world. Divine love can only be achieved through celibacy and spiritual ascension up to the Intellectual world. Additionally, Milton places the Lady in control of her own body; she is the one who resists the seduction of Comus, an act of defensive virginity that places personal liberty and responsibility in the hands of the individual rather than the state. In the *Ludlow Maske*, divine union with man or king as promoted by the Carolinian masques of the court is replaced by the Lady's ability to access the divine spirit within.⁴³

The presence of Neo-Platonic philosophy is found early in the masque, during the Attendant Spirit's introductory speech:

Above the smaok and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confin'd, and pester's in this pin-fold here,
Strive to keep up a frail, and Feaverish being
Unmindefull of the crown that Vertue gives
After this mortal change, to her true Servants
Amongst the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats.
Yet som there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that Golden Key
That op's the Palace of Eternity.⁴⁴

I quote this passage in full because it occurs at the very start of the performance and sets the agenda for the content of the show. The earth is figured as a smoky and "dim spot" that confines people like animals in a pen. Many in this dark world do not recognize the "crown that Vertue gives," but those who do are able to lay their hands on that "Golden

⁴² In the masque Comus is described as the son of Bacchus and Circe.

⁴³ For a purely Neo-Platonic reading of the *Ludlow Maske* see Sears Jayne, "The Subject of Milton's *Ludlow Maske*."

⁴⁴ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 5-14.

Key,” which will open the gates of heaven. The Lady is one who recognizes the power virtue provides, for through her virtue, she is able to access the divine/God in herself (the “Golden Key”). Coming closer to God, in turn, ensures her place in the “Palace of Eternity.” The Lady already has enough virtue to access the Golden Key; in spiritual terms, she has ascended from the Elemental world to the Intellectual world on the Neo-Platonic spiritual ladder, an adaptation of the ladder of love from the *Symposium*. Neo-Platonic philosophers saw the world on a macrocosmic and microcosmic level; what happened on the earthly plane reflected the individual’s spiritual plane. Therefore, the earthly love union of the lower bestial senses of the Elemental world transforms into a metaphor for the philosophic awakening of a spiritual relationship between God (macrocosm) and man or woman (microcosm) in the Intellectual world. It is not a literal sexual union, but a metaphysical connection between the individual (microcosm) and divinity (macrocosm) that resides in the spirit of the person. The Lady’s purity of body gives her power, for she can tap into the divine/God within her spirit for strength whenever it is necessary.

Comus represents the bestial love of the Caroline court, which is trapped in the Elemental world. This is evident in Comus’s use of the earthly form of Venus (Ficino describes two faces of Venus—an earthly Venus representing bodily or carnal love and the spiritual Venus in which love is on a divine, spiritual level)⁴⁵ while he lies in wait for his next victim: “What hath Night to do with sleep? / Night hath better sweets to prove, /

⁴⁵ See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1985), 53-54.

Venus now wakes and wak'ns Love."⁴⁶ The love described by Comus is not spiritual; the love he speaks of is carnal love, associated with the Elemental world, which he directly correlates with the night. Instead of night representing the contemplative and spiritual nature of divine melancholy as described in "Il Penseroso," it is associated with earthly desire and bodily pleasures. That Comus symbolizes a bastardized form of Platonic philosophy is furthered by his mangled allusion to the Lady's journey upon the steps of spiritual ascension. Comus describes his reaction to seeing her brothers in the forest as such: "I was aw-strook, / And as I past, I worshipt; if those you seek / It were a journey like the path to heav'n, / To help you find them."⁴⁷ Comus's mention of a journey to heaven based on carnal desire mimics the Lady's progress along the Neo-Platonic ladder of spiritual development, since the only help he plans to offer her is sexual in nature. The journey is not one to heaven, but rather *like* a journey to heaven because Comus is stuck on the mundane and worldly plane of bestial desire. He represents exactly what the Lady must rebuke in order to continue developing her spiritual relationship with the divine/God.

The Neo-Platonic influences in the *Ludlow Maske* not only refute the Platonic cult of Charles's court and court masques, but they also emphasize virginity as a significant contributor to spiritual growth and development. Milton clarifies the esoteric nature of virginity throughout the masque and differentiates it from the Platonic ideas espoused by the court. The differing philosophical views on virginity are presented by the two brothers—the older brother focuses on his sister's spiritual wholeness, while the younger

⁴⁶ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 122-124.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 301-304.

is concerned with her bodily state.⁴⁸ The younger brother worries about the physical threats to his sister: “But O that hapless virgin our lost sister / Where may she wander now, whether betake her / From the chill dew, amongst the rude burrs and thistles?”⁴⁹ He goes on to agonize about possible scenarios his sister might encounter: the Lady sleeping against “rugged bark” with no pillow for her head, ravaged by “Savage hunger,” or stricken by “Savage heat.”⁵⁰ The fears expressed by the younger brother are grounded in terms of the body. He is concerned about his sister’s warmth, sleep, comfort, and hunger. The “savage heat” he mentions in this passage most certainly refers to the savage heat of carnal desire, the most damaging threat a “hapless virgin” could face alone in the dark and wild woods. Yet the younger brother’s concerns focus solely on threats to the Lady’s person and do not include the spiritual repercussions such a violation would entail.

The older brother, in contrast, is confident in his sister’s morality: “I do not think my sister so to seek / Or unprincipled in virtues book...As that the single want of light and noise...Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts.”⁵¹ The older brother recognizes that the Lady holds dear her most valuable asset—virtue. His consolations to his younger brother also contain references to Neo-Platonism. The Lady’s virtue and contemplation leads her to “plume her feathers, and lets grow her wings,” bringing her closer to God.⁵² Furthermore, this reference places the Lady firmly in the Intellectual world, as that world houses not only spiritually evolved people, but also angels (who are,

⁴⁸ Maryann Cale McGuire notes the differing views of the brothers as well, but she sees their discussion as reflective of a particular work from the Caroline court, *Jealous Lovers*. See Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton’s Puritan Maske*, 148-150.

⁴⁹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 350-352.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 354, 358.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 366-371.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 378.

of course, winged). The younger brother is not quite convinced of his sister's safety, and worries that the Lady is physically at risk in the woods, unable to defend herself. In a long response to his younger brother's objections, the older sibling names her best defense:

'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity;
 She that has that, is clad in compleat steel,
 And like a quiver'd Nymph with Arrows keen
 May trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,
 Infamous Hills, and sandy perilous wildes,
 Where through the sacred rates of chastity,
 No savage fierce, Bandite, or mountaineer
 Will dare soyl her virgin purity...⁵³

The Lady's virginity/chastity is such that it cannot be penetrated. It is the best armor she could have and so powerful that it protects her in a variety of situations because it allows her to pull strength from the divine/God within. From hill to heath, no criminal (or commoner) can soil her purity. In a moment that sounds much like an echo of Spenser's descriptions of Una and Britomart, he continues listing the evils virginity is capable of fending off, and even invokes "the old Schools of Greece" to add weight to his argument. Diana and Minerva are the examples he draws from—both women faced adversity and threats to their virginity; both women successfully defended their virginity. The purity of virginity, which the elder brother describes as "the unpolluted temple of the mind," can become immortal, in terms of the soul, if it remains unstained and pure; he has confidence their sister can maintain her bodily temple in order to keep the temple of her

⁵³ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 419-427.

mind clean as well, as that is the only way to continue her spiritual ascension.⁵⁴ The discussion between the two brothers mirrors the differences between the Platonism of the Caroline court and Milton's Neo-Platonism. These differences are fundamentally centered on the physical/carnal/bestial desires of the flesh of the Caroline court's Platonism (the Elemental world) and the purely spiritual "temple of the mind" (the Intellectual world) of Neo-Platonic philosophy. The older brother wins the debate, and the younger concedes: "How charming this divine Philosophy!"⁵⁵ The message taken from their banter is that a virtuous and pure body is the foundation for a pure mind, which allows the spirit to move into the Intellectual world. Once one has ascended into the Intellectual world, he/she may tap into the divine/God the lies within, but this is only achievable when one is pure of body.

Recall that Milton uses the terms "chastity" and "virginity" interchangeably in the masque. This is due to the masque genre Milton is working in; it would be inappropriate for Milton to use the term "virgin" exclusively as it might suggest the young noblewoman of marriageable age (Alice Egerton) playing the Lady did not have marriage in her future.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is no surprise that the Lady's first appearance in the masque addresses her chastity. During a long speech she verbalizes her fears about the forest and highlights three things that will protect her:

These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended

⁵⁴ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 461.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 476.

⁵⁶ The additions Milton makes to the published version of the masque, which I address later, heavily emphasize virginity, making it evident that Milton meant virginity to be a major component of the Lady's character.

By a strong siding champion Conscience.-----
 O welcome pure ey'd *Faith*, white-handed *Hope*,
 Thou hov'ring Angel girt with golden wings,
 And though unblemish't form of *Chastity*...⁵⁷

The phrase “faith, hope, and charity” is a familiar one, but Milton changes “charity” to “chastity.” The virtuous mind is aided by pure faith, the white-handed angel of hope, and chastity. Moreover, chastity is further qualified as “unblemish't,” meaning that the particular form of chastity referred to within these lines is a chastity untainted by sex—virginity. Other words in the passage further underscore the purity of the Lady speaking them; she is not just invoking “faith,” but “pure faith,” a reflection of the spotlessness of her body and mind. Hope is described as “white-handed.” The “white-hand” is another modifier alluding to the virginal state of the speaker, for whiteness is commonly correlated with purity and virginity.⁵⁸

Milton takes the phrase “faith, hope and charity” from St. Paul and alters it; his alteration reflects an acknowledgement of the importance of the individual and the relationship between charity, chastity, and God. For Milton, charity is “a chaste love of God that informs one’s use of secular things;” this concept is also articulated through his religious tracts and *The Christian Doctrine*.⁵⁹ Charity is expressed by one’s love for God, a chaste love that is not carnal but spiritual in nature. Chastity is an individual state of mind, “the necessary basis for Christian liberty...because it allows the soul to join with

⁵⁷ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 210-215 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁸ Recall that Spenser spent some time discussing the whiteness of Una (and her goat) as a marker of her virginity and purity.

⁵⁹ Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton’s Puritan Masque*, 143-144.

God in charity,”⁶⁰ which in its highest form is a reciprocal relationship with God akin to the Neo-Platonic divine union with God. Chastity is the basis for charity, a work requiring closeness with God. In turn, getting closer to God can be attained only through the purity of mind acquired by chastity, a purity the Lady embodies.

The Lady’s virginity and chastity is recognizable by other characters even though these qualities are not always visible to the eye. Comus distinguishes the Lady’s footsteps as those of a chaste virgin: “...I feel the different pace, / Of some chaste footing near about this ground...Some Virgin sure / (For so I can distinguish by mine Art).⁶¹ In this case chastity acts as an outward sign of an internal state, the state of virginity. That the Lady arouses such detection by Comus seems to be directly related to her gender, for Comus does not mention the virginity or chastity of the brothers he encounters (their young ages imply there is no question about their sexual status). The Lady’s purity and gender marks her as a different target, one of untapped sexual potential, setting her apart from others.

Comus has a reputation for turning corrupt men into animals, but the violation of the Lady will be different as symbolized by the “different pace” that draws Comus’s attention to her. According to the story relayed by the Attendant Spirit, Comus poisons his victims and they are changed:

into som brutish form of Woolf, or Bear,
Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or Bearded Goat,
All other parts remaining as they were,
And they, so perfect in their misery,

⁶⁰ James Obertino, “Milton’s Use of Aquinas in *Comus*,” *Milton Studies* 22 (1987): 27.

⁶¹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 145-149.

Not once perceive their fowl disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before.⁶²

If Comus is able to seduce the Lady, she will be transformed into a bestial being, but the transformation will be an internal one. The loss of her virginity is just as damaging to her in the long run as if he had changed her into a goat or bear. If she succumbs to Comus, her purity will be gone, and she will fall from the Intellectual world into the bestial Elemental world. Once the Lady is tainted by this corruption of the flesh, she will no longer have the ability to tap into the divine/God within herself. She is vulnerable in this way and should be protected.

The setting of the *Ludlow Maske* places the Lady in a vulnerable state; she is lost, alone in the woods, and it is dark outside.⁶³ However, she should not be alone. When the Lady set out on her journey, she was accompanied by her brothers. As the Lady's father is not there to protect her, her brothers must act as her guardians, a role they are not particularly successful in. The Lady explains that when her brothers saw she was tired, they told her to rest while they "se'd to the next Thicket side / To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit."⁶⁴ However, they never returned, leaving her abandoned in the forest. The forest, much like the young players in the masque, reflects the literal setting of the performance. Ronald Corthell sees the woods as "a liminal space where the girl makes her passage from virgin daughterhood to married womanhood."⁶⁵ While I agree that the

⁶² John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 70-75.

⁶³ Once again, these tropes are all too familiar. Recall that Una was lost in the forest, and both Una and Britomart were at their most vulnerable at night.

⁶⁴ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 185-186.

⁶⁵ Ronald Corthell, "Go Ask Alice: Daughter, Patron, and Poet in *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle*, 122.

woods are a liminal space in which the Lady's virtue is tested, there is no indication based on the textual evidence that she marries or has sex; in fact, the masque suggests quite the contrary. The forest does act in a liminal space by providing Milton a way to address the issue of inadequate male guardianship, an issue that arises from the historical circumstances surrounding the family who commissioned the masque—the Castlehaven scandal and the rape of Margery Evans.

The forest in *Ludlow Maske* ultimately symbolizes the forest around Ludlow castle. Ludlow castle is in Wales, and “Wales in Milton's time was considered wild and uncivilized, and was very far from the center of both power and culture.”⁶⁶ The rape of Margery Evans took place in the wilderness, and Evans's rape was not an isolated event. William Schullenberger notes that “[y]oung women were raped in the woods around [Ludlow castle], and their pleas for justice miscarried.”⁶⁷ A young virgin lost in the forest and vulnerable to a bad man must have seemed like déjà vu to the original audience viewing the masque. Margery Evans was raped while walking alone through the woods as the sun was setting. Given this dangerous set of conditions, Miss. Evans should not have been left unguarded. It is under an eerily similar set of circumstances that the Lady in the *Ludlow Maske* is left unguarded as well. When the brothers abandon their sister in the dark woods, leaving her alone, it is only too clear what dangers the forest holds for her—the danger of sexual violation. Milton makes this connection to point out that young ladies need male guardians who can protect them. Without a guardian, women become prey for sexual predators like Comus.

⁶⁶ Stephen Orgel, “The Case for *Comus*,” 32.

⁶⁷ William Schullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's Comus as Initiation*, 111.

The woods are described as dangerous early in the masque to set the tone and highlight the threats lurking within the forest. The Attendant Sprit explains that the evil Comus

Lies through the perplex't paths of this drear Wood,
 The nodding horror of whose shady brows
 Threats the forlorn and wandering Passinger
 And here their tender age might suffer peril.⁶⁸

The description of the woods instills fear; it holds untold threats and horrors. The forest is also confusing with its “perplex’t paths.” The text suggests there are multiple paths, with multiple possibilities; it is up to the journeyer to choose the right one. These factors make the woods threatening to the lonely and lost; younger travelers of a “tender age” may suffer particularly. Age and experience can afford some protection from the evil lurking within the woods, for through experience one learns the dangers of the world. Children, being less experienced and exposed to evil and the temptations within the forest, are especially vulnerable in their innocence. The forest then becomes a testing ground of sorts, a place where morality is challenged.

The foreboding forest as a setting for the Lady’s trial (and later triumph) is foreshadowed by her pleas to God just before she follows Comus back to his lair. She states:

...In a place
 Less warranted then this, or less secure
 I cannot be, that I should fear to change it,

⁶⁸ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 36-39.

Eie me blest Providence, and square my triall
To my proportioned strength.⁶⁹

The Lady is in a completely vulnerable position, away from her family and home, with no guardian, alone, and in the dark. She invokes God's providence as a symbol of her weakness in the situation and asks him to test her in proportion to her strength. The strength of her faith and virtue, if measured by her trial, is unwavering. The test, which comes in the form of Comus's attempted seduction, speaks to the Lady's strongest asset—her bodily virginity, which is protected by her spiritual chastity. While the test may seem a bit extreme, Jeanne S. Martin reminds us that

[t]he protection which heaven exercises over virtue follows upon the confrontation with evil and is conditional upon the assertion of virtue in the face of temptation...If virtue were not allowed to encounter and be tempted by evil then it would lose its meaning entirely as a willed condition worthy of divine reward.⁷⁰

The Lady must "prove" her virtue by confronting and rejecting temptation—the bigger the temptation, the more meaningful the rejection of temptation becomes.

The Lady must go through her test alone in order to prove her virtue. Her isolation in the woods reflects her self-reliance as well as the threats she faces as an unattended maiden in the dangerous woods. The relationship between the Lady's virtue, spirituality, and her test are drawn together in an isolated and seemingly innocuous passage: "They left me then, when the grey-hooded Even'n / Like a sad votarist in

⁶⁹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 326-330.

⁷⁰ Jeanne S. Martin, "Transformations in Genre in Milton's *Comus*," in *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, Vol. 2, The Early Poems, ed. J. Martin Evans (New York: Routledge, 2003), 321.

Palmer's weed."⁷¹ The evening, as Roy Flannagan notes, is figured as a monastic figure.⁷² According to Neo-Platonic philosophy, solitude is a time of contemplation, and the Lady compares her plight to that of a sad votarist, one who has taken vows of a religious nature. The Lady is stripped of her family, her home, food, and water; she only has her virginity and virtue to help her through this trial in the woods. The journey or pilgrimage motif and the predetermined outcome of her trail in the woods is exemplified by her reference to a palmer, one who has returned from the Holy land. That she compares herself to a pilgrim who has already made the journey to the Holy land indicates that she will be triumphant when her trial comes.⁷³

The forest setting allows for the use of light and darkness as an indicator of the true virtue found in Neo-Platonism, which contrasts with the evil and false Platonism of the court. The contrast between darkness and light cannot, however, be simplified into a simple binary of good (light) and evil (darkness). It is, after all, only through her journey into the darkness that the Lady becomes closer to God, moving her up on the path of spiritual ascension. The darkness associated with Comus symbolizes the negative aspects of the night; it is a darkness that breeds evil and false magic rather than contemplation. Comus praises the darkness: "Hail goddess of Nocturnal sport / Dark-vaild *Cotytto*, t'whom the secret flame / Of mid-night Torches burns; mysterious Dame..."⁷⁴ *Cotytto* is a Thracian goddess associated with the night who presides over secret orgiastic rites.⁷⁵ At midnight, rather than contemplating in solitude, Comus frolics about and engages in

⁷¹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 188-189.

⁷² Roy Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, 132, note 126.

⁷³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., n. "palmer," www.oed.com (accessed February 7, 2010).

⁷⁴ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 128-130.

⁷⁵ Roy Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, 129, note 92.

sexual escapades. The midnight torches that burn are not those of the Neo-Platonic philosopher from the tower in “Il Penseroso;” they are a defiled version of Platonism that reflects a disintegration of the spirit into the body of bestial desires.

Interestingly, the Lady mentions the lantern of night, recalling Milton’s earlier poem “Il Penseroso.” The Lady questions why the “thievish night” has

...but for som felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the Stars,
That nature hung in Heav’n, and fill’d their Lamps
With everlasting oil, to give due light
To the mislead and lonely Travailer?”⁷⁶

The natural light, a gift from God, should shine down on the Lady, but due to the presence of Comus in the woods, the true light of heaven is hidden. The Lady seems to sense some type of impending doom, for she suspects there is a “felonious” reason why the light has gone away. Comus’s manipulation of nature, a manipulation which is negative and unnatural, is the reason for the problem. The Lady asks “the Supreme good” to send a “glistening Guardian...To keep my life and honour unassail’d.”⁷⁷ The moon appears at that very moment, “turn[ing] forth her silver lining on the night, / And casts a gleam over this tufted Grove.”⁷⁸ The moon appearing at the Lady’s command represents the power of virginity, which has become her guardian in place of her brothers, and there is a suggestion, since it is the moon that appears to light the Lady’s path instead of the stars, that we should connect the moon with chastity, perhaps even Diana. The

⁷⁶ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 195-200.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 217, 219-220.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 224-225.

moon functions as both a symbol of the “chaste Diana” and a “type of Platonic-Christian fidelity between the human soul and the ‘Supreme Good’ [God].”⁷⁹ The Lady’s dedication to her body and spirit, which manifests as chaste virginity, is capable of calling forth the natural lamp of heaven’s light, with its everlasting oil. The Lady’s light is not just goodness, but spiritual closeness with God, as well as purity of the body and mind.

The mirror discussions of light and darkness by the Lady and Comus, along with the differing views of the body expressed by the brothers, highlight the philosophical differences between carnal desires of the flesh (Platonic/Elemental) and purity of the body and spirit (Neo-Platonic/Intellectual). These differences are embodied by Comus and the Lady, respectively. The climax of the masque is, of course, the seduction scene. In the moments leading up to the seduction and during the seduction, silence and speech become another polarity explored by the characters. In the *Ludlow Maske* the Lady’s speech has more power because it is endowed by the divine/God within her. She is not reliant on belonging to a particular religious group, like Abigail from *The Jew of Malta* or Isabella from *Measure for Measure*, to find authority in her voice. Rather, the power of virginity in the masque lies within the individual self.

The Lady uses her voice to sing a song to help her remain calm when she realizes that her brothers are nowhere to be found, and the forest is full of rambunctious wassailers. She directs her song to Echo; “the echo song, in which part of the verse gets

⁷⁹ Rosamond Tuve, “The Symbol of Light in *Comus*,” in *Milton: Comus and Samson Agonistes: A Casebook*, ed. Julian Lovelock (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), 78.

repeated as a refrain, or as an answer, was a popular form in the period.”⁸⁰ However, as Stephen Orgel points out, there is no call and response or repetition of refrain in the song.⁸¹ The Lady asks Echo if she can tell her the whereabouts of her brothers, “[t]hat likest Narcissus are?”⁸² O if thou have / Hid them in som flowry Cave, / Tell me but where.”⁸³ The answer to the Lady’s question, of course, never comes. She is completely on her own, “literally singing to herself” by singing to Echo.⁸⁴ The Lady’s song foreshadows the self-reliance she will demonstrate later in the masque.

Additionally, the Lady’s song mentions a nightingale: “the love-lorn Nightingale / Nightly to thee her sad Song mourneth well.”⁸⁵ The nightingale comes from Ovidian lore. Angelica Duran provides a summation of the nightingale’s story from Book VI of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*: “...Philomela transforms in the woodland bird after she and her sister Procne wreak horrible retribution from Philomela’s mutilation and repeated rapes at the hands of Tereus, Philomela’s brother-in-law and Procne’s husband.”⁸⁶ The Lady’s early mention of the nightingale sets up the expectation that an attempted rape will occur, as nightingales are frequently associated with female vulnerability in general and rape in particular. In an ironic twist, it is this very song that incites lust for the Lady in *Comus*, who is listening to her sing from afar. When he hears her sing, his sexual desire is

⁸⁰ Stephen Orgel, “The Case for *Comus*,” *Representations* 81 (2003): 40.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸² Stephen Orgel reads the reference to Narcissus as a reflection of the narcissistic attitudes of the Lady’s brothers (41). It is hard to imagine this is what Milton had in mind when he wrote the song, especially since the roles of the brothers were played by the sons of the man who commissioned the masque. I think it more likely that the reference to Narcissus is a commentary on the young age of the boys, as Narcissus was a young man when he first encountered Echo.

⁸³ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 236-239.

⁸⁴ Stephen Orgel, “The Case for *Comus*,” 40.

⁸⁵ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 234-235.

⁸⁶ Angelica Duran, “The Lady in Milton’s *A Mask*: From Philomela to *luscina magarhynchos*,” *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 31 (2002): 46.

aroused: “Can any mortal mixture of Earths mould / Breath such Divine and enchanting ravishment?”⁸⁷ The Lady’s song, her voice, is exactly what facilitates Comus’s attempt to violate her virginity.

The Attendant Spirit describes the Lady as a nightingale when he relays the feelings her singing aroused in him: “Amaz’d I stood, harrow’d with grief and fear, / And O poor hapless Nightingale thought I, / How sweet thou sing’st, how neer the deadly snare!”⁸⁸ The Attendant Spirit’s invocation of the nightingale indicates that the Lady is in bodily danger; she is in danger of rape. The nightingale symbolizes helplessness, similar to Spenser’s use of the nightingale to depict Una as

a meek bird seeking protection from violent males characterized as bird of prey, but at the same time, the nightingale can be a symbol of power, as demonstrated in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, in which the mute Lavinia uses Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as a stage prop to explain her rape and mutilation.”⁸⁹

The Lady’s mention of the nightingale foreshadows the impending threat of rape she will face in the masque; the Attendant Spirit uses the nightingale in a similar way as Spenser—the nightingale works as an avatar for the Lady’s weakness, but the Lady is far from weak. She embodies the independence and self-reliance of Lavinia; she overcomes her weakness and is able to speak when her words are needed to defend her virginity, for her words and the power of chaste virginity (that allows her to draw on power from the divine within) are the only two weapons she holds in her arsenal to fight against the dark magic of Comus.

⁸⁷ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 244-245.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 565-567.

⁸⁹ Angelica Duran, “The Lady in Milton’s *A Mask*: From Philomela to *luscinia magarhynchos*,” 48-49.

While the Lady “is always associated with music and concord, and her singing ravishes with delight all who have her good fortune to hear it,” the music of Comus symbolizes “chaos, sin, disharmony.”⁹⁰ The Lady hears the frivolity of Comus and his derelict crew; the sounds they make scare her: “This way the noise was, if mine ear be true, / My best guide now, me through it was the sound / Of riot and ill manag’d Merriment.”⁹¹ The “ill manag’d merriment” sounds like a flute or pipe, according to the Lady. She compares the sounds to the spring celebrations that occur when flocks reproduce and the granaries are full. At that time, the servants “[i]n wanton dance they praise the bounteous *Pan*, / And thank the gods amiss.”⁹² She wants no part of the “rudenesse” and “insolence” of these “Wassailers.”⁹³ The rustic nature of the music and its association to Pan links to Comus quite clearly. Comus lives in the woods, a rustic of sorts, and his revelries are sexual, rude, and insolent. The fertility of spring in Comus’s forest is firmly grounded in the body and earthly desires, the Elemental world, as his music reflects.

Comus hears the Lady sing, he desires her at that moment, and he begins his attempt to seduce her. First he flatters the Lady and hails her as a “forren wonder” because she appears out of place in the rustic setting of the forest. Comus goes on to say that her “blest song / forbid[s] every bleak unkindly fog.”⁹⁴ Fog is associated with petulance or evil,⁹⁵ so in a sense Comus tells the Lady that her song is beautiful enough to

⁹⁰ A. E. Dyson, “The Interpretation of *Comus*,” 114, 113.

⁹¹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 170-172.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 176-177.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 265, 268-269.

⁹⁵ Roy Flannagan, *The Riverside Milton*, 135, note 178.

drive away evil, which it has not succeeded in doing, as Comus stands before her. The song, instead of driving evil away, actually attracts evil (Comus) to her. The Lady explains her predicament, which leads Comus to question to honor of her brothers. He repeatedly asks “why” her brothers would leave her alone. It is interesting that Milton includes this line of debate between the Lady and Comus, as Comus’s questioning of the Lady’s brothers once again draws attention to the problem of inept male guardians. Even Comus, a ruffian, recognizes the faux pas committed by the brothers in leaving their sister alone in the forest; he also takes advantage of the indiscretion by continuing his suit of her. He asks the Lady how important her brothers really are to her: “Imports their loss, beside the present need?”⁹⁶ The Lady replies, “No less then if I should my brothers loose.”⁹⁷ Comus asks the Lady about the importance of her brothers at the moment (“present need”), suggesting their absence is only a passing problem that can be reconciled by someone else as long as she is assisted out of her current situation. The Lady, however, feels the present loss of her brothers just as deeply as she would a permanent loss of them. She is as troubled by the temporal absence of her brothers as she would be by the permanent loss of them—“Loose” in this context means “[f]reed from engagement, obligation, etc”—a response that demonstrates a deep commitment to her family and brothers.⁹⁸ Even in this early stage of Comus’s attempted seduction, the Lady counters his arguments. Comus’s arguments are based on the physical, the here and now, while the Lady considers the long term and spiritual aspects of the points he raises.

⁹⁶ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 287.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., a. and adv., “loose,” www.oed.com/ (accessed February 7, 2010).

Perhaps the Lady should have been suspicious of a shepherd who suddenly appears, insults her family (her brothers), then offers her his assistance. Readers and critics wonder why a young lady—vulnerable, scared, and alone—would trust a perfect stranger in the wild and dark borderland forest, but recall that the Lady asked providence to make her trial equal to her strength just before following Comus to his home. By placing the outcome of her abandonment in God's hands, she openly accepts whatever trial God deems her worthy of. If the Lady is a true believer in providence, and she tells us that she is, then she will take the help offered to her with the knowledge that it is all part of a greater divine plan. That she goes with the shepherd is not an indication of her naïveté, nor is a testament to Comus's skill as a deceiver. The Lady's acceptance of her future as determined by the divine represents her spiritual maturity, a spiritual level that is only available to her because of her chaste virginity; armed with the power of her virginity, she has the strength to persevere in whatever trial is set before her.

That trial is Comus's seduction, and Comus attempts to sway the Lady by tempting her senses with food. As Donald K. Anderson notes, within texts of the early modern period banquets can be figurative as well as literal, meaning that the characters are tempted with different sensual experiences. Essentially, each sense symbolizes one of the "courses" at a banquet.⁹⁹ The banquet became associated with love as well as food, appealing to the senses on multiple physical levels. Milton uses the banquet trope in this scene to emphasize the sensual nature of the attempted seduction: "[f]ood and sex are equated throughout the debate between Comus and the Lady; for her to accept his drink is

⁹⁹ Donald K. Anderson, "The Banquet of Love in English Drama (1595-1642)," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63 (1964): 422.

tantamount to yielding her body, as she well knows.”¹⁰⁰ The stage directions describe the setting as “a stately Palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness; soft Musick, Tables spread with all dainties.”¹⁰¹ This reflects the lascivious milieu of Comus’s castle in relation to the banquet metaphor. The palace is described as stately, appealing to the sense of sight; the table contains “dainties,” indicating food that is pleasing to taste and perhaps even smell; the soft music arouses the ears. Milton’s use of the phrase “all manner of deliciousness” to depict the castle environment represents the lustful and bestial intentions of Comus. The language of the stage directions indicates that Milton had the banquet of senses in mind when he wrote them.

The sense of touch is broached by Comus’s next move—he offers the lady a cup of wine, but when she goes to rise, he stays her by threatening to turn her into a statue. The Lady’s response is swift and intelligent:

Fool do not boast,
 Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde
 With all thy charms, although this coporal rinde
 Thou haste immancl’d, while Heav’n sees good.¹⁰²

Comus offers the Lady bodily nourishment, but her retort turns the focus back to the mind and spirit. Although Comus may attempt to command her body, he has no access to her mind at all. He might imprison her body, “this corporal minde,” but he can never have her spirit, which is firmly connected to God. Heaven sees her purity, and God knows that she is untainted spiritually, for he lives within her. As Katherine Eisaman

¹⁰⁰ James Obertino, “Milton’s use of Aquinas in *Comus*,” 24. Obertino also notes that St. Thomas uses food as a metaphor for sexuality.

¹⁰¹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, page 153.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 662-665.

Maus points out, “what seems like a capitulation turns out to be resistance: the Lady unlocks her lip in order to refute Comus’s argument, not to drink his potion or allow him any access.”¹⁰³ She is empowered by her chaste virginity, and since her mind and body are pure, she rejects the bestial temptations of the flesh to receive greater spiritual rewards in the future. Once again, it is a case of battling philosophies—one more concerned with satisfying the flesh (Platonic/Caroline court) and the other with spiritual reward through the rejection of fleshly delights (Neo-Platonic). The chaste virginity of the Lady empowers her as an individual because it allows her to connect with the power of the divine/God and use that power. This form of defensive virginity is totally self-reliant—the Lady does not need to be financially solvent, associated with a religious house, or protected by anyone else; she has the power she needs within herself.

Comus’s arguments to convince the Lady to give him a chance do not hold much weight with her because his argument focuses on the body and requires interaction with another, which would undercut the Lady’s autonomy. Comus responds to the Lady by using the “false rhetoric of the [Platonic Caroline] court.”¹⁰⁴ He first admonishes the Lady for her virginity, claiming that she goes against nature: “...you invert the cov’nants of her trust, / and harshly deal like an ill borrower / With that which you receiv’d on other terms.”¹⁰⁵ “Her” in this line refers to nature. Comus complains that the Lady inverts nature. She is given a gift in her fertility and sexuality, but acts like an “ill borrower” by rejecting the very prize nature has given her. He fails to understand that nature is

¹⁰³ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), 206.

¹⁰⁴ G. F. Sensabaugh, “The Milieu of *Comus*,” 246.

¹⁰⁵ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 682-684.

ordained by God. Comus specifically lashes out at those “doctors of *Stoick Furr*” who praise “the lean and sallow Abstinence.”¹⁰⁶ Abstinence is in conflict with nature and bodily desires, but abstinence is not just a philosophy: it is a monstrosity in its inversion of nature. The tour de force of his argument comes on the familiar form that sounds much like a carpe diem poem and resembles the “Cavalier literary misogyny” that was associated with the Caroline masques:¹⁰⁷

List Lady be not coy, and be not cosen'd
 With that same vaunted name Virginitie,
 Beauty is natures coyn, must not be hoorded,
 But must be currant...
 If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
 It withers on the stalk with languish'd head.
 Beauty is natures brag and must be shown
 In courts, at fasts, and high solemnities...¹⁰⁸

Comus's speech emphasizes the fleeting nature of beauty, and “the magician's argument ends not in the provision of life for its own replenishment, but in mere gratification.”¹⁰⁹ His argument is grounded in the body, the Elemental world, and since Comus is the villain of the story, this represents an anti-Caroline court stance. G. F. Sensabaugh explains that Comus uses language of the Platonic coterie and their techniques to corrupt the beautiful lady.¹¹⁰ These techniques involve an attempted assault on her senses and an argument for sex based on gratification of the flesh. The Lady, on the other hand, speaks of the chaste virginity aligned with Neo-Platonic philosophy. Her refutation of Comus's

¹⁰⁶ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 707, 709.

¹⁰⁷ Leah S. Marcus, “Literature and the Court,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 507.

¹⁰⁸ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 737-746.

¹⁰⁹ A. S. P. Woodhouse, “The Argument of Milton's *Comus*,” 249.

¹¹⁰ G. F. Sansabaugh, “The Milieu of *Comus*,” 247.

attempted seduction rests within her spirit, which is connected to the divine/God through her pure body.

The Lady's wholehearted rejection of Comus's offer is a stand for virginity Milton seems to endorse, but other men in the masque code her abstinence as a hoarding of wealth. In Comus's assertions regarding the natural inclination people have for sex, the natural consequence or result of sex is reproduction. Julie Kim explains the complex relationship between female sexuality, power and worth:

While Caroline masques may depict women as having power in their sexuality, either in use or in restraint of it, evidence from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests that women's sexual power ultimately serves men's purposes.

A woman's virginity and chastity, ideally sources of her empowerment but in reality widely associated with material wealth, represent her worth and the wealth of her male relatives—for her husband because of the dowry awarded with her and for her father or brothers because she becomes linked with family honor and the wealth transferred with her.¹¹¹

Milton boldly rejects the Caroline version of female sexuality (the masque does not show any sexually powerful women, though it does mention them), yet he does explore the ways in which female worth is tied to pre-marital virginity and post-marital chastity. His approach is, however, quite odd. The Lady's need to maintain her virginity, which eventually is presented as a more severe form of abstinence—celibacy—is addressed by the men in the masque in terms of hoarding riches.

Hoarding wealth is compared to hoarding one's virginity by males in the *Ludlow Maske*. That this comparison would come from a male perspective is perhaps not shocking, but two of the male characters involved in the discussion are pre-pubescent

¹¹¹ Julie Kim, "The Lady's Unlikely Struggle," 5.

boys, a strange presentation, to say the least.¹¹² The younger brother (remember, the child playing this role was nine) is very concerned with the sexuality of his older sister. To leave her in the forest unguarded (though he has already abandoned her), he says, is akin to laying out jewels for a thief:

You may as well spread out the unsun'd heaps
Of misers treasure by an out-laws den,
and tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on Opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjur'd in the wilde surrounding wast.¹¹³

His concerns are about the violation of her person, but they are infused with monetary references. Even a boy of nine realizes that the Lady's virtue and reputation are linked to that of the family and familial honor, thus impacting the family's financial worth, and his worth as well. The "treasure," the Lady's virginity, has been guarded by the family and tucked safely away in the home until now. Once the treasure is removed from its hiding place, others will see the treasure's beauty and worth. The younger brother fears the temptation of such a beautiful treasure will not go unnoticed in the wild woods; someone will seize this opportunity and steal their treasure away. If the Lady's virginity/treasure is taken, the family name will be soiled; the Lady will not be able to attract a suitor that

¹¹² Julie Kim notes the same "peculiarity" of such young boys discussing their sister's sexuality. "The Lady's Unlikely Struggle," 6-7.

¹¹³ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 398-403. This passage can also be tied back to the Margery Evans case, as she was a young lady who was left in the woods and consequently robbed of her virginity and reputation.

equals her noble rank.¹¹⁴ Clearly this passage exemplifies the anxieties surrounding improper male guardianship for women. Given the young age of the boy, the abandonment of his sister serves as a lesson to him and the audience: women must be accompanied by male guardians, suggesting that when men are unable to guard women in their households, they are unable to adequately govern.

Comus makes the same conflation between hoarding wealth and virginity as the Lady's younger brother while trying to seduce the Lady, and like the younger brother, he uses the image of a miser or hoarder to make his point:

She [Nature] hutch't th'all-worshipt ore and precious gems
To store her children with; if all the world
Should in a pet of temperance feed on Pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but Freize
Th' all-giver would be unthank't, would be unprais'd,
Not half his riches known, and yet despis'd,
And we should serve him as a grudging master,
As a pernicious niggard of his wealth,
And live like Natures bastards, not her sons...¹¹⁵

Nature has all these riches hidden with her to give her children (humanity). If we choose, he argues, to be temperate and eat simply by feeding on pulse (a bean-like fruit), drink simply by ingesting water, and live simply by wearing freize, we are not giving nature or God their due. There is an interesting pronoun shift in these lines. Comus starts by speaking of Nature (feminine), but then changes the course of his argument by invoking the "all-giver," God, as masculine. The change is subtle, but gendered. While nature is

¹¹⁴ There does seem to be some sort of subtle reference to the Castlehaven scandal here, for certainly the reputations of Anne and Elizabeth were beyond repair after the scandal. Anna never remarried and Elizabeth spent her life estranged from her husband, James Audely.

¹¹⁵ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 719-727

praised for *her* fertile glory, it is a man, God, who is to be served. If the Lady insists on remaining a virgin, she is serving God like a “pernicious niggard [miser],” by hoarding her fertile womb. Comus invokes this image of unnaturalness as a description of virgins, for those who do not engage in sex are the illegitimate children of Nature, rather than her true children. The correlation of virginity with unnaturalness in the *Ludlow Maske* relates to the individualism of virginity in this context. The virgin finds her strength from within, not in any outside relationship or stimulation of the senses, but through the divinity she holds in her spirit.

While Comus speaks of the ways temperance goes against both God and Nature, the type of sexuality the Lady endorses is more extreme than temperance. She pushes for sexual abstinence instead. The Lady declines Comus’s offer, still championing spiritual purity over earthly desire:

I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none
But such as are good men can give good things,
And that which is not good is not delicious
To a wel-govern’d and wise appetite.¹¹⁶

The Lady tells Comus there is no goodness in a gift given from one who is as evil as him. If a gift is not given in goodness and purity, it is no gift at all and wholly unappealing to a person who has control over her appetite. For the Lady, her virtue, something she wants, is more important than satisfying a desire, a want. What the lady does not want from anyone, it appears, is sex. In her self-control and adherence to her values, she is wise. Moreover, “[t]here is no love talk or sex talk in the Lady’s response. This is not because

¹¹⁶ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 702-705.

she is a prude in the making...but because she is already more grown up than Comus.”¹¹⁷

I would clarify Schullenberger’s comment by adding that she is more mature *spiritually* as well. Because of the Lady’s pure body and mind, she has ascended the ladder of spiritual growth beyond the Elemental world where Comus resides to the Intellectual world, where she is able to commune with the divine/God within her.

Despite the Lady’s stern rejections of Comus, he does persist in trying to convince her to see things his way. Jean Graham observes that Comus has already “metaphorically raped her by forcing her virgin mouth open.”¹¹⁸ The Lady has little choice to but to respond to him—she can accept his offer or reject it, but either move requires her to speak. The Lady makes it clear that she was initially not planning to speak so openly to Comus:

I had not thought to have unlockt my lips
In this unhallow’d air, but that this Jugler
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes
Obtruding false rules pranckt in reasons garb.
I hate when vice can bolt her arguments
And virtue has no tongue to check her pride...¹¹⁹

The imperative nature of the situation forces the Lady to speak, whether she wants to or not. She speaks in a defensive move to protect her virginity from violation. The “Jugler” or magician is trying to alter her judgment by applying rationality to the irrational—vice. The Lady, hating when virtue is silenced, uses her voice to “check [the] pride” of vice.

¹¹⁷ William Schullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth*, 172.

¹¹⁸ Jean E. Graham, “Virgin Ears: Silence, Deafness, and Chastity in Milton’s *Maske*,” *Milton Studies* 36 (1998): 3.

¹¹⁹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 756-761.

She is capable of defeating vice because of her virtue. If she were not a chaste virgin, she would be unable to succeed in her endeavor, for it is her virginity that gives her spiritual power.

Once the power of the Lady's virginal voice is unleashed, it is difficult to stop. In the Trinity and Bridgewater manuscripts, the Lady stops her speech around line 779, but in the published version of the text, there is an addition of about twenty-seven lines, which help clarify the vision of virginity she represents:

...Shall I go on?
 Or have I said enough? To him that dares
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
 Against the Sun-clad power of Chastity,
 Fain would I something say, yet to what end?
 Thou has neither Eare nor Soul to apprehend
 The sublime notion, and high mystery
 That must be utter'd to unfold the sage
 And serious doctrine of Virginitie,
 And though art worthy that thou shouldst not know
 More happiness then this thy present lot.
 Enjoy your deer Wit, and gay Rhetorick
 That hath been so well taught her dazzling fence,
 Thou are not fit to hear thy self convic't;
 Yet should I try, the uncontroled worth
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rap't spirits
 To such flame of sacred vehemence
 That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves and shake,
 Till all thy magick structures rear'd so high,
 Were shatter'd into heaps o're thy false head.¹²⁰

The Lady's words express the awesome power of virginity, a power she invokes through her access to the divinity housed in her spirit, for strength in her battle against Comus.

¹²⁰ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 779-799.

She describes Comus as unable in body (unintelligent) or soul (lack of purity) to comprehend the “sage / and serious doctrine of Virginitie.” His inability to understand stems from his place on the ladder of spiritual ascension; he is on the lowest rung, firmly grounded in the base ways of the worldly realm in the Elemental world. The “deer Wit” and “gay Rhetorick” she complains of is, in fact, the rhetoric of the Caroline court, which is also the rhetoric of Comus. The wit and rhetoric of the Caroline court is not true Platonism, for Comus has no way to comprehend the “sublime notion” or the “high mystery” associated with true Neo-Platonic philosophy, an esoteric philosophy that can only be understood by those who practice the “serious doctrine of Virginitie.”

This speech solidly moves the Lady away from any shred of temperance “and bends it to the unyielding, absolutist virtue of sexual abstinence central to a very different doctrine” than that of married chastity.¹²¹ The flame of “sacred vehemence” recalls the Neo-Platonic undertones promoted by the Lady throughout the masque. Her strong emotional response sets off a frenzy of sorts, a burst of creative energy inspired by a pure mind spiritually engaged with the divine. Moreover, “[t]he Lady’s body state expresses itself in a profession of virginity as its poet and prophet; her virginity makes her rhetorically and politically stronger, rather than more vulnerable.”¹²² This strength, which she draws from “the Sun-clad power of Chastity” and the divine/God she has discovered in herself, allows her to defend her virginity. She represents a “radical assertion of virginal power [that] posits the virgin’s magical capacity to effect change in

¹²¹ John Rogers, “The Enclosure of Virginitie: The Politics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Renaissance,” in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 231.

¹²² William Schullenger, *Lady in the Labyrinth*, 179.

the world by virtue of nothing more than a static condition of moral and physical purity.”¹²³ While Rogers is correct in assessing the strength of change virginity can affect, chaste virginity is not a static condition. It is a condition that forces the beholder to constantly imagine new ways to defend her moral and physical purity against a myriad of threats and violations that present themselves at every turn, in every forest, and, sometimes, as is the case with the Castlehaven scandal, even at home. The Lady’s words, empowered by her virginity, are not static at all. Rather, her words do make a change in Comus; they stop him for a moment. When the Lady finishes her speech, Comus is awestruck: “She fables not, I feel that I do fear / Her words set off by som superior power.”¹²⁴ Indeed, the Lady’s words are of a superior power, but that superior power is within the individual, an individual with incredible moral fortitude.

The brothers, who are not yet adept male guardians, are unable to rescue their sister in the end (though it is unclear she is in need of rescue), and they must rely on another virgin to finally free the Lady from Comus’s grasp. Although they arrive before the Lady is forced to drink from Comus’s cup, they do not break Comus’s wand as the Attendant Spirit instructed them, so the Lady remains seated “[i]n stony fetters fixed, and motionless.”¹²⁵ The Attendant Sprit advises them that they must now call on Sabrina for assistance.¹²⁶ Sabrina is a virgin and former victim of violence, whose story is recorded on Monmouth’s *History* and retold by Milton. Briefly, Sabrina’s father, Lochrine (king of

¹²³ John Rogers, “The Enclosure of Virginity,” 237.

¹²⁴ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 800-801.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 819.

¹²⁶ Interestingly, Sabrina’s name is derived from the Severn River, and Margery Evans was raped in the Severn Valley. See Roy Flannagan, introduction to *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, by John Milton, 111.

England and son of Brutus), fell in love with her mother, Estrildis, but was already promised to Gwendolyn. Eventually circumstances provided Locrine the opportunity to leave Gwendolyn to marry Estrildis, which he did. However, Gwendolyn gathered troops and attacked Locrine, killing him. She ordered Estrildis and her daughter by Locrine (Sabrina) killed and thrown in the Severn River. After Sabrina was dumped in the river, Milton relates, Nereus took pity on the girl and ordered his daughter to bathe her

i[i]n nectar'd lavers strew'd with Asphodil,
 And through the porch and inlet of each sense
 Dropt in Ambroial Oils till she reviv'd,
 And underwent a quick immortal change
 Made Goddess of the River."¹²⁷

Because of her past trials, the river goddess has a soft spot for maidens in distress, "[f]or maid'nhood she loves, and will be swift / To aid a Virgin, such was herself / In hard besetting need."¹²⁸ For this reason, the Attendant Spirit directs the boys to ask Sabrina for assistance in freeing their sister, a task they were unable to complete themselves. The boys cannot free the Lady because they are different from her; "[i]t is because of what they have in common, the text implies, that Sabrina is able to release the Lady...the crucial protagonists in Milton's drama of projected rape, the embodiments of virtue (as well as the imperiled victims) in the text are women."¹²⁹ Therefore, it is only another woman, a virgin in particular, who can rescue the Lady.

¹²⁷ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 838-842. The Story of Sabrina's parentage is documented by Roy Flannagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton*, 160, note 527.

¹²⁸ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 855-857.

¹²⁹ Harriet Hawkins, "The Seduction of Comus," in *Style: Essays on Renaissance and Restoration Literature and Culture in Memory of Harriett Hawkins*, ed. Allen Michie and Eric Buckley (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 63.

The Lady has avoided a physical sexual violation, and she has preserved the purity of her mind, but she must still be cleansed and purified by Sabrina before she is able to rise from the chair. The purification process involves water from Sabrina's fountain being sprinkled on the Lady. She is sprinkled on her breasts, fingers, mouth, and seat. This purification is required because the Lady has successfully passed the trial providence gave her. The trial now complete, she must be cleansed before she can literally and figuratively rise to the next level of spiritual development. The water sprinkles symbolize "a renewed infusion of divine grace, whose imagery belongs to the same category of Christian symbolism as in its most familiar example in Christian baptism."¹³⁰ Newly anointed and ready to move on to the next step in her spiritual journey, the Lady arises to be led back home to her father and mother, this time under the watchful eye of the Attendant Spirit and her brothers, who hopefully better understand the responsibilities of male guardianship after their experience in the forest.

Once the Lady is released from her seat, she never utters another word in the masque. Actually, her words stop after her long speech to Comus. I think there is some power in this move. Had the Lady been truly violated (as some critics suggest is the reason for her purification by Sabrina), there would be no merit in staying silent, no virtue to protect. However, the Attendant Spirit continues to fear Comus and see him as a threat, even as the children make their way out of the forest:

Com Lady, while Heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursed place,

¹³⁰ A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Comus Once More," in *A Masque at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus*, ed. John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western University, 1968), 76.

Lest the Sorcerer us intice,
 With som other new device.
 Not a waste, or needless sound
 Till we com to holier ground.¹³¹

If the Lady's virginity or virtue were in question, there would be no more damage for Comus to do. Furthermore, the Attendant Spirit mentions that Heaven's grace will allow them to get out of the forest safely, another act of providence. It is hard to believe such grace would be extended were the Lady corrupted by Comus at any point. Her silence is yet another defensive move, a way to close herself off from threats she may encounter on her way home. Her silence also symbolizes the contemplative silence required by Neo-Platonism.

The Lady, along with her brothers, is returned to the shelter of her home and the guardianship of her mother and father. The Attendant Spirit's final words address the success of the Lady's trials. When presenting the children back to their parents he says:

Heav'n hath timely tri'd their youth,
 Their faith, their patience, and their truth.
 And sent them here through hard assays
 With a crown of doubtless Praise,
 To triumph invictorious dance
 O've sensual Folly, and Intemperance.¹³²

The final words of the *Ludlow Maske* remind us that it was written for a specific occasion and commissioned by someone with a vested interest in its performance. The Spirit says that all of the children have been tried, but clearly the trial of the Lady is much greater

¹³¹ John Milton, *Mask of the same Author Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, 938-943.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 970-975.

than that of her brothers. Returned to male guardianship—first to the Attendant Spirit and her brothers, then to her father—the Lady no longer has to defend her virginity for herself; she falls under the rule of the male authority under which she lives, and her true life role as daughter of the Lord President of Wales. Regardless of her return home to the adept guardianship of her father, because the Lady is a virgin and her spirit has ascended to the Intellectual world, she can call upon the divinity within her at any time to empower her defensive virginity.

Milton's *Ludlow Maske* presents two distinct political critiques; one of those critiques targets inadequate male guardianship. Milton casts two young boys as guardians of the Lady in the masque. The boys, likely due to their youth, prove to be inadequate male guardians for the Lady. Because they abandon her, she falls into Comus's trap. The Castlehaven scandal and the case of Margery Evans both involve a lack of proper male guardianship and have direct ties to the Earl of Bridgewater, the man who commissioned the masque. Hence, the *Ludlow Maske* suggests that men should be conscientious in providing safety for women in their family, for there are many Comus-like predators to contend with in the world. The Attendant Spirit's final speech hints that the boys have learned their lesson through their experience in the forest and now know how to be competent guardians for their sister.

Milton also uses the *Ludlow Maske* as a platform to express his discontent about the Caroline court's misuse of Platonic philosophy. This is evident by the expression of mirroring views regarding the body and mind throughout the masque. The brothers have a debate that is philosophically similar to the debate between the Lady and Comus; both

discussions involve contradictory perspectives on the body and mind. These binary views about the body and mind reflect the differences between Milton's Neo-Platonism, which privileges the spirit/mind, and the Platonism of the Caroline court, with its focus on the body. The Platonism of the Caroline court as reflected in Milton's *Ludlow Maske* is based on the Elemental world, a world that is defined by the flesh and fulfillment of bodily desires. In the masques of the court, the Platonic union was figured as the union of lovers with a focus on the body, a focus that does not allow for spiritual ascension, which is only possible through purity of the body.

Milton endorses a Neo-Platonic philosophy in the masque that views the lover's union in Platonism as a metaphor for a spiritual union between the divine/God and the seeker. In Neo-Platonic philosophy, God (the divine) is everywhere and in all things, including the spirit of the individual. In this way, those who remain pure, through celibacy, can ascend to a higher spiritual plane where they can experience contact with the divine in themselves. The Lady of the masque does just that; her virginity allows her to ascend to the Intellectual world, thus giving her access to the divine/God within herself. The power of the divine within assists her in defending her virginity from violation by Comus. This type of power, based on purity of the body, resides within the individual. It is not dependent of being part of a convent, or financial solvency. Rather, the power of the divine derived through virginity is only located in the individual. Therefore, the Lady demonstrates the most independent form of defensive virginity depicted in the works examined in this study.

EPILOGUE:
VIRGIN BODY, VIRGIN QUEEN

The cultural and historical impact of Queen Elizabeth I's virginity is undeniable. Just how ingrained Elizabeth's virginity has become within Western thinking became apparent to me recently. On the first day of a freshman seminar on representations of Elizabeth I, I gave students a list of terms and names linked to early modern studies and asked them to write down words they associated with the terms and names. Among the names, of course, was Elizabeth. When I asked the class to share what they wrote about Elizabeth, an obviously excited student raised her hand high and exclaimed, "Virgin!" Notably absent from the list was any of Elizabeth's many accomplishments. Since several of the students are North Carolina natives, I expected someone to mention Sir Walter Raleigh's lost Roanoke Island colony, but no one did. Other significant historical events were conspicuously missing from the list as well: the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, reformation of Protestantism and the Church of England, and Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation around the globe.

This exercise demonstrates the inherent problem with many studies of early modern literature: when virginity is addressed in early modern literature, it is frequently intertwined with the Queen's virginity.¹ It is true that Elizabeth utilized her virginity for political advantage, but her success in practicing defensive virginity was made possible

¹ One major exception to this is Theodora Jankowski's *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

by her position as queen. Elizabeth's virginity does represent and overlap with general concerns about the place of virgins in a culture where virginity no longer had the social capital it once enjoyed, yet Elizabeth's success using virginity to her advantage does not appear to have made an impact on her subjects, as her reign did not alter or change common views on virginity. Elizabeth's virginity was an exception to societal norms of her day rather than the rule because her status as queen allowed her to carve out a social space for her virginity. Other women did not have the power to create a niche for themselves, and the one niche virgins had enjoyed for hundreds of years, the convent, was gone. Women who wanted to remain virgins were displaced, and no one, it seems, quite knew what to make of them.

With the convents disbanded and no alternatives for women who wanted to remain virgins readily available, life-long virginity had no recognizable cultural place, making it counterintuitive that virgins would appear in the literature of the period. This is especially true in light of the fact that Elizabeth's reign had no noticeable effect on the legal and social statuses of never-married singlewomen. But virgins are present in early modern English literature; their presence indicates that virginity, though displaced and stripped of its former cultural capital, was still an issue worth talking about. This is what we see in texts of the period that address virginity—an attempt to sort out what the virgin's role might be in a new social climate where she has no designated place. In trying to locate a space for the virgin, writers imagined possible ways that defensive virginity might allow women to prolong or reject marriage successfully, but often, though not invariably, ended up conceding that the best place for a virgin was the altar.

Because virginity that does not lead to marriage is uncommon in these texts, it is typically negatively re-coded as non-normative and subversive. Even prolonged virginity (as in the case of Olivia) often leads to similar textual interpretations. In a fairly recent article Kathryn Schwarz states that “virginity is always at least potentially an alternative and radical mode of sexuality; the militant self-determinism, the high camp parody, the stone butchery, perhaps, of the early modern period.”² Schwarz tip-toes around the issue of stigmatizing virginity in her use of language: “always at least potentially.” The certainty of “always” is tempered by the “potential” nature of the stigma linked to virginity. Schwarz’s hedging indicates the problematic nature of coding virginity as always subversive and odd, but at the same time, her words demonstrate that many studies on virginity and perceptions of virginity in the period do present it as an “alternative” lifestyle. This statement suggests early modern writers frequently characterized virginity as extreme or rare; however, my study shows that is not always the case.

In my class students reacted to the representations of Elizabeth they have been exposed to, representations that emphasize the Queen’s sexual status over her many accomplishments. Literary studies on early modern virginity do much the same thing by either connecting Elizabeth’s sexuality to any text that addresses virginity or representing virgins as homo or auto-erotic. Ultimately, the choice to practice defensive virginity symbolizes the power of an individual, for virginity is simply a biologic state; it is only when defensive virginity is used that virginity can have power in post-Reformation

² Kathryn Schwarz, “The Wrong Question: Thinking Through Virginity,” *Representations* 13, no. 2 (2002): 17.

England. When focusing on the body alone in interrogating virginity, there is a possible danger in diminishing the power of the individual in relation to the mind and individual spirit. The purpose of this study is an attempt to redirect the critical conversation about virginity in early modern literature to one that is more expansive and moves beyond virginity as a sexual state; the way to accomplish this is to look for moments of female agency within texts through defensive virginity. We have seen several facets of defensive virginity in this study—defensive virginity to protect a maiden until she is united with her destined husband, defensive virginity that tries (but fails) to exist beyond the confines of the convent in the city, defensive virginity that succeeds due to financial solvency, and defensive virginity that is empowered by esoteric Neo-Platonism. The writers included in my investigation highlight the presence of the virgin, as well as her displacement, in post-Reformation texts in varying ways. This displacement provided writers an opportunity to reimagine and interrogate how defensive virginity might function in reformed England.

The characters Spenser constructs in *The Faerie Queene* at times blur the boundaries between Catholicism and Protestantism in regards to virginity. Una's character is more allied with Catholicism in that she inspires devotion wherever she travels and is modeled on the Virgin Mary. Her betrothal to the Red Crosse Knight is assumed, but their impending marriage is not the focus of Book I; rather, the focus is on preparing Una for her future role as mother and teacher. Britomart, as the Knight of Chastity, overtly seeks marriage, an act that signifies her alliance with more Protestant teachings. Una's defensive virginity is passive since she models ideal female behavior of

the period, which includes traits like submissiveness. Britomart's defensive virginity is active; she takes up arms to seek out her husband. However, neither woman is able to refrain from marriage. By the end of their respective stories, they are both married. In *The Faerie Queene*, defensive virginity can only be maintained for a short time and works to protect the virgin for marriage.

Elizabeth is like Una and Britomart in that she represents a fusion of some Catholic influences with Protestantism. I am not calling into question Elizabeth's religious leanings; it is well documented that she was a devout Protestant, but the Queen did co-opt the symbol of the Virgin Mary. Carole Levin notes that "[t]he identification of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary, which developed in the mid-1570s, was very effective in encouraging loyalty to the queen."³ Though it is acknowledged by Levin and others that Elizabeth's use of the Virgin Mary helped heal the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in England, and there is little doubt that it did, I submit that because Mary's virginity still held some of the cultural capital from Catholicism, appropriating the Virgin Mary also empowered Elizabeth's defensive virginity in a way that she could not empower it alone.⁴ Also, the Queen vacillated between appearing active and passive. This is particularly evident in her Tilbury Speech. The speech, given before her soldiers forged into battle with the Spanish, fuses the passive, weak woman (Una) with the active,

³ Carole Levin, "*The Heart and Stomach of a King:*" *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994), 27. Helen Hackett also documents Elizabeth's identification with Mary in her book *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

⁴ Helen Hackett reminds us to keep in mind that the Reformation did not happen overnight, and it was no simple matter to tease out differentiations in Catholicism and Protestantism from one specific date onward. See Helen Hackett, "Rediscovering Shock: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary," *Critical Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1993): 32.

warrior woman (Britomart). One line in particular is emblematic of the fusion: “I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king...”⁵ Here Elizabeth acknowledges the weakness of her female exterior while emphasizing that she, as an individual, is masculine in spirit. In this way, Elizabeth embodies both Una and Britomart at the same time.

Because Elizabeth was queen, she was able to carve out a space for herself as a virgin by parlaying the power of the Cult of the Virgin Mary into the Cult of Elizabeth. Other women who wanted to remain life-long virgins were not so lucky. As I have shown, although the convents were closed and Catholicism was not openly practiced in early modern England, virginity was still a social issue the country was grappling with. What happened to women who left convents and did not want to marry? What circumstances would make a woman choose to enter a convent and reject marriage? These questions are explored in *Measure for Measure* and *The Jew of Malta*. These plays do not provide clear answers to the questions they explore, but convents do serve important functions in *Measure for Measure* and *The Jew of Malta*. They represent a space where virginity can have cultural capital, for enclosure within the convent is what helps Isabella and Abigail find their voices, and with their voices they gain individual autonomy and ultimately power, if only for a short time.

For Elizabeth, even if there was a convent to enter, that option would not have been available to her. Cloistering for the Queen was more metaphorical. Her virginity

⁵ Elizabeth Tudor, “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams 7th ed., vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 597.

resulted in the closure of the Tudor line, as her perpetual virgin state, which extended past her child-bearing years, meant there would be no Tudor heir. This cloistering is tempered by Elizabeth's openness towards her people later in her reign. She takes not one man for her husband, but every Englishman and woman. Her country becomes her spouse. This choice is not a rejection of sexuality, but a move of defensive virginity, as Elizabeth's virginity allowed her to maintain her autonomy. The openness of this choice and Elizabeth's engagement with the people she ruled circumvented the problem her virginity created once it was evident she would not marry. Much like Isabella and Abigail, the power of Elizabeth's voice is paradoxically a product of her enclosure, for it is her voice alone. She does not share her power with a husband; therefore, her speech retains its authority through the enclosure of her virginity.

Elizabeth did not share her throne with a man, so she did not share her finances with anyone else either. Elizabeth's defensive virginity protected her assets from falling into the hands of a husband.⁶ Indeed, the Queen was a fiscally solvent virgin who ran her finances prudently, just as Moll runs her business prudently in *The Roaring Girl*. Elizabeth was able to recover England's faltering economy during her reign, while Moll's savvy business sense allows her to remain unmarried and fiscally solvent despite her low social class and status as a never-married singlewoman. Elizabeth embodies some of the characteristics displayed by *Twelfth Night's* Olivia too. Like Olivia, Elizabeth was orphaned and had family members who threatened her at every turn. Based on speeches

⁶ Many of the suitors suggested during Elizabeth's marriageable years were Catholics. If she married, her money would have become infused, at the very least, with that of her husband. A Catholic husband could well mean that some of her money would go to Catholic causes, so it was in her best interest to retain control of all her money and property.

and personal writings of the Queen, it is also clear she would not have married anyone who was not of her liking or presented a threat to her throne. This is similar to Olivia as well, since Olivia decides whom she wants to marry—a decision that appears to be influenced by a desire to retain control of her finances and property.

Elizabeth's virginity fused some fragmented ideologies of Catholicism (namely, the power of the Virgin Mary) with Protestantism. The Queen took on the role of passive and active woman and altered that role to suit the occasion; she used her virginity to enhance the power of her voice, and acted as a fiscally solvent never-married singlewoman. All of these aspects of Elizabeth are found within the literary texts explored in this study, but these characteristics are based on the empowerment of the individual. The Lady in Milton's *Ludlow Maske* exemplifies the individual spirit and strength required to maintain virginity even in the face of temptation. Although Comus tries to convince the Lady of the unnaturalness of her virgin state in the masque, the Lady negates his faulty arguments. The Lady's strength comes from the purity of her body and mind; she has ascended on the Neo-Platonic ladder of spiritual development and is immune to bestial desires of the flesh. Her rejection of Comus is not just a rejection of sex, but a rejection of a life grounded in the Elemental world, and an acceptance of a life of contemplation and spiritual development of the individual. Elizabeth's defensive virginity is an act of individualism as well, for it is through defensive virginity that the Queen is able to make her own choices. Her choices changed the course of England's history, and Elizabeth, in her sole reign, is able to take full credit for those choices.

Virginity is a multi-faceted state, and even though there was not a specific place for virginity to fit into early modern English culture, clearly virginity was still a cultural issue. The texts in this study interrogate what virginity looks like in a society where it has no designated place and finds that sometimes there are rare occasions when life-long virginity is possible. However, life-long virginity, as depicted in these early modern texts, is an option that typically has limited successes. That is, unless you just happen to be queen.

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